

Rewritten Gentiles: Conversion to Israel's 'Living God' and Jewish Identity in Antiquity

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in the Graduate Program in Religion  
in the Graduate School  
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2014

ABSTRACT

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the ideological developments and strategies of boundary formation which accompanied the sociological novelty of gentiles' becoming Jews in the Second Temple period. I argue that the phenomenon of gentile conversion influenced ancient Jews to re-conceive their God as they devised new ways to articulate the now-permeable boundary between Jew and "other," between insiders and outsiders. Shaye Cohen has shown that this boundary became porous as the word "Jew" took on religious and political meanings in addition to its ethnic connotations. A gentile could therefore become a Jew. I focus on an ancient Jewish author who thought that gentiles not only could become Jews, but that they *should*: that of *Joseph of Aseneth*. Significant modifications of biblical traditions about God, Israel, and "the other" were necessary in order to justify, on ideological grounds, the possibility of gentile access to Jewish identity and the Jewish community.

One such rewritten tradition is the relationship of both Jew and gentile to the "living God," a common epithet in Israel's scriptures. Numerous Jewish authors from the Second Temple period, among whom I include the apostle Paul, deployed this biblical epithet in various ways in order to construct or contest boundaries between gentiles and the God of Israel. Whereas previous scholars have approached this divine title exclusively as a theological category, I read it also as a literary device with discursive power which helps these authors regulate gentile access to Israel's God and,

in most cases, to Jewish identity. *Joseph and Aseneth* develops an innovative theology of Israel's "living God" which renders this narrative exceptionally optimistic about the possibilities of gentile conversion and incorporation into Israel. Aseneth's tale uses this epithet in conjunction with other instances of "life" language not only to express confidence in gentiles' capability to convert, but also to construct a theological articulation of God in relationship to repentant gentiles which allows for and anticipates such conversion. A comparison of the narrative's "living God" terminology to that of the book of *Jubilees* and the apostle Paul sets into relief the radical definition of Jewishness which *Joseph and Aseneth* constructs – a definition in which religious practice eclipses ancestry and under which boundaries between Jew and "other" are permeable.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Joseph and Aseneth* is a tale of transformation. The daughter of an Egyptian priest becomes a daughter of the God of Israel and the wife of the patriarch Joseph. Aseneth's story "fills in" the details of her courtship and marriage, mentioned only briefly in the Genesis tale whose characters and setting provide the narrative framework for the post-biblical work (Gen 41:45, 50; 46:20). Like many tales of romance, *Joseph and Aseneth* weaves a story of love sparked, thwarted, and finally consummated.<sup>1</sup> Joseph initially refuses Aseneth's amorous advances because, he says, he cannot use the same mouth to bless "the living God" and kiss a woman who worships "dead and mute idols" (*Jos. Asen.* 8:5).<sup>2</sup> Aseneth's lips – along with her entire person – are transformed, however, as the narrative unfolds and she abandons her Egyptian gods in favor of exclusive worship of

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<sup>1</sup> On the narrative's affinities to the ancient Greek romance novel, see Marc Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (SPB, 13; Leiden: Brill, 1968), 43-47; and esp. Patricia Ahearne-Kroll, "Joseph and Aseneth and Jewish Identity in Greco-Roman Egypt" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2005), 88-142. For an enjoyable summary of the plot in modern fairy-tale vocabulary and a helpful discussion of the narrative's resistance to easy generic categorization, see Edith M. Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth* (Guides to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> The question of the text of *Joseph and Aseneth* is one of the most debated in the scholarship. Today it exists in two principal recensions, one shorter and one longer, which are reconstructed in two critical editions, by Marc Philonenko (*Joseph et Aséneth*) and Christoph Burchard (*Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth: Überlieferung-Ortsbestimmung* [WUNT, 8; Tübingen: Mohr, 1965]; "Ein vorläufiger griechischer Text von Joseph und Aseneth," *DBAT* 14 [1979]: 2-53; and *Joseph und Aseneth* [assisted by Carsten Burfeind and Uta Barbara Fink; PVTG 5; Leiden: Brill, 2003]), respectively. As I explain in a subsequent chapter, I follow the model recently advanced by Patricia Ahearne-Kroll which suggests that the best approach is not to use either critical edition but rather to examine the manuscript evidence to identify the textual elements common to both of the earliest streams of transmission of Aseneth's story ("*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity," 14-87). For details, see Chapter Three below.

the God of Israel. Aseneth's story is thus one about the heroine's movement "from death to life."<sup>3</sup> It is a story about conversion.

The date and provenance of the anonymously-penned *Joseph and Aseneth* are unknown, though many scholars understand the narrative to be a product of Greek-speaking Judaism in Egypt from around the turn of the era.<sup>4</sup> The tale was likely composed in part to provide an explanation for Joseph's marriage to an Egyptian woman, which would have been considered unlawfully exogamous in many circles of post-exilic Judaism (e.g., Ezra 9:1). The author's answer to this apparent problem is that Joseph could marry Aseneth because she first converted.

This solution is anachronistic in the narrative setting of *Joseph and Aseneth*, since conversion was a sociological novelty in the Second Temple Judaism of which earliest Christianity was a part. Ancient Israel defined itself in genealogical terms, that is, as a people sharing a common ancestry. Membership was not, therefore, something that could be acquired through a transference of religious allegiance. It was not until Judaism's encounter with Hellenism, as Shaye J. D. Cohen has argued, that the boundary between Jew and gentile became permeable as the word *Ioudaios* acquired religious and political meanings in addition to its ethnic connotations.<sup>5</sup> With this reconception of

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<sup>3</sup> Randall Chesnutt's important monograph on conversion in *Joseph and Aseneth* correctly claims that Aseneth's transformation "is conceived as transition from death, destruction and corruption...to the life, immortality and incorruption enjoyed by those who worship God" (*From Death to Life: Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 145).

<sup>4</sup> I review the scholarship on this question in Chapter Four, where I also propose my own argument in favor of this setting for the text's origins.

<sup>5</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 109-39.

Jewishness, a gentile could become a Jew. A body of literary evidence demonstrates that gentiles “on the ground” took advantage of this possibility and did attach themselves in some way to the God of Israel and to the Jewish community.<sup>6</sup> Paul’s gentiles in Christ, ethnic non-Jews who worshiped the Jewish God as their own, provide the most extensive example.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, simply because gentiles could convert and did convert does not mean that all Jews thought that gentiles *should* convert. In fact, as Christine Hayes has shown, some Second Temple Jews, such as the author of *Jubilees*, rejected the very possibility of conversion by constructing Jewishness exclusively in genealogical terms.<sup>8</sup> Building on Hayes’ work, Matthew Thiessen has argued that there was not in Second Temple Judaism a universal understanding that circumcision was a conversion rite whereby gentile males could lose their foreskins and gain Jewishness.<sup>9</sup> Rather, a minority tradition rejected the possibility of conversion on the grounds that only eighth-day circumcision was legitimate, covenantal circumcision. From this point of view, no adjustment of religious allegiance or action of any kind could undo or overcome one’s ancestry. A gentile, therefore, could not become a Jew. As Thiessen comments:

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<sup>6</sup> Cohen organizes the evidence of gentile affiliation with Judaism into seven categories of contact, one of which is full conversion and “becoming a Jew” (*The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 140-74).

<sup>7</sup> On Paul’s demand for these gentiles’ exclusive worship of YHWH as a Jewish “ritual demand,” see Paula Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations: The Ritual Demands of Paul’s Gospel,” *NTS* 56 (2010), 232-52.

<sup>8</sup> Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

The extant literature demonstrates that conceptions of Jewishness during [the Second Temple] period were variegated, and, in fact, were in competition with one another. There were no established criteria held by all Jews to define Jewishness. Jewish identity was, therefore, a matter of debate. Who was a Jew? Who could become a Jew? How could one become a Jew? Or even, *could* a non-Jew become a Jew?<sup>10</sup>

The present project engages these same questions, but in reverse order, and with focus on a text which represents “the competition”: that of *Joseph and Aseneth*, a narrative which accepts that a non-Jew could indeed become a Jew.

It is well-known that the author of *Aseneth*’s tale answers the final question in Thiessen’s list in the affirmative: *Aseneth*, an Egyptian, may marry Joseph and join Israel upon her conversion. The ways in which the ancient author responds to the other questions Thiessen articulates have not yet received due attention. For *Joseph and Aseneth*, how does one become a Jew? In other words, how is it that conversion is possible, and even desirable? Moreover, how does the answer to that question help us understand the way in which this narrative constructs Jewish identity (i.e., what it means to be a Jew)? This dissertation seeks to show how *Joseph and Aseneth* contributes to the variegated picture of Jewish attitudes toward gentile conversion in antiquity and, particularly, to assess what role it might have played in the competition surrounding the definition of Jewishness.

Since some authors who rejected conversion had *ideological* grounds for doing so (e.g., *Jubilees*’ appropriation of Ezra’s “holy seed” theology), it stands to reason that we must ask what *ideological novelties* accompanied the social phenomenon of gentiles’ becoming Jews in the Second Temple period. Indeed, in my judgment, acknowledging

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<sup>10</sup> Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 4.

the novelty of conversion in Second Temple Judaism while also recognizing that not all Jews accepted it opens up a new set of questions about those very texts which *do* embrace gentile conversion: What theological novelties accompanied, or even gave birth to, such an outlook? What modifications of inherited traditions had to be made to allow for the possibility of the inclusion of gentiles? What developments in the Jewish views of God, Israel, and “the other” made conversion acceptable or even appealing?

As I apply these questions to *Joseph and Aseneth*, I approach the newly permeable boundary between Jew and gentile from an angle which is different from, though complementary to, that of Cohen’s study of the word *Ioudaios*: I ask what linguistic developments surrounding Second Temple Jewish conceptions of the *divine* accompanied the important philological shift which Cohen points out. I insist that the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* is not merely concerned with Aseneth and Joseph and their exploits. This author also cares about God. That is, this author is interested in theology (a word which I use narrowly to mean “ideas about God”). I am interested, ultimately, in how the sociological innovation of conversion influenced the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* to re-conceive Israel’s *God* and how this re-conception was put into language.

Thus, I read Aseneth’s tale as, in part, an interpretation of the identity of Israel’s God, one which is developed in conversation with God’s role in Israel’s scriptures. As *Joseph and Aseneth* unfolds, its author unravels the implications of that identity for those people who are not part of (genealogical) Israel. As I have already mentioned, the title patriarch in *Joseph and Aseneth* refers to his God as “the living God” (8:5), and this appellation appears again in reference to Israel’s God in some textual witnesses as

Aseneth repents (11:10 [Burchard's versification]) and as she receives a new name from her angelic visitor at the conclusion of her transformation (19:8 [Burchard's versification]). I argue that *Joseph and Aseneth*, along with several other ancient Jewish authors (among whom I include the apostle Paul) deployed the biblical title "the living God" in a variety of ways in order to construct or contest boundaries between gentiles and Israel's God.

Whereas previous scholars have approached this divine epithet exclusively as a theological category, I read it also as a literary device with discursive power which helps these authors regulate gentile access to Israel's God and, in most cases, to Jewish identity. My goal is to show that *Joseph and Aseneth*, which I argue is a Jewish document composed in first-century BCE or CE Greco-Roman Egypt, develops an innovative theology of "the living God" which renders this narrative exceptionally optimistic about the possibilities of gentile conversion to Israel's God and incorporation into the people of God. *Joseph and Aseneth*, I contend, uses this epithet in conjunction with other instances of "life" language not only to express confidence in gentiles' capability to convert, but also to construct a theological articulation of God in relationship to repentant gentiles which allows for and anticipates such conversion.

While I focus on the epithet "the living God," which also occurs in the anarthrous form "living God," this project is not principally a word study. Edward Everding has amassed an impressive register of appearances of this epithet as it occurs in the Hebrew Bible, the Greek translations of Israel's scriptures, and the literature of post-biblical



Judaism and early Christianity.<sup>11</sup> My aim is not to catalog. Rather, I endeavor to (1) interpret the *function* of this language in its narrative contexts and (2) demonstrate its significance in *Joseph and Aseneth*'s creative theological developments and appropriation of biblical traditions. I limit my examination of "living God" terminology to those instances which are useful for comparison with *Joseph and Aseneth*. For that reason, I concentrate on the epithet's occurrences in narratives (i.e., in prose stories), and I treat both the arthrous ("the living God") and anarthrous ("living God") forms, which both occur in the manuscript tradition of *Joseph and Aseneth*. In the course of my examination, the epithet proves to be a useful lens for viewing the different ways in which various narratives construe the theological implications of ethnic differences.

It has long been recognized that the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* is familiar with the Greek translation(s) of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in order to understand the meaning and function of the epithet "(the) living God" in Aseneth's tale, it is beneficial to examine first the role this divine title plays in Israel's scriptures. In Chapter One, I show that an important valence of the epithet "(the) living God" in these texts has been overlooked: its function in narrative contexts as a discursive boundary marker which separates Israel and Israel's God from gentiles. After distinguishing my approach to studying the epithet from that of previous scholars, I examine the title's literary function in Deut 4-5, Josh 3,

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<sup>11</sup> Edward H. Everding, "The Living God: A Study in the Function and Meaning of Biblical Terminology" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Harvard, 1968). Everding also treats the related "oath formula," which is frequently formulated "as YHWH lives..." in biblical literature.

<sup>12</sup> See esp. Gerhard Dellling, "Einwirkungen der Sprache der Septuaginta in 'Joseph und Aseneth'," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 9 (1978), 29-56. Susan Docherty has demonstrated that *Joseph and Aseneth* is much more dependent on the text of Genesis than scholars had previously realized ("*Joseph and Aseneth*: Rewritten Bible or Narrative Expansion?," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 35.1 [2004], 27-48).

1 Sam 17, and 2 Kings 18-19 in order to demonstrate that, in these passages, Israel's "living God" is, in poetic irony, the one who brings *death* to adversarial gentiles. Since the God of Israel is not categorically and indiscriminately opposed to non-Israelites in Israel's scriptures, it is especially striking that the title "(the) living God" often appears in contexts of actual or threatened destruction of gentiles. I argue that in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, this divine title is featured in contexts of identity-definition and boundary-formation, and that it plays a key role in forging Israel's status as a nation distinct from all other nations. This argument lays the groundwork for subsequent chapters by identifying a biblical tradition with which I believe later Jewish authors, including that of *Joseph and Aseneth*, engage as they forge new identities vis-à-vis gentiles.

Chapter Two traces this boundary-marking epithet through later narratives in order to survey its transformation in Greek-speaking Second Temple Judaism. I demonstrate that while Esther OG and 3 Maccabees each portray gentile kings addressing the Jewish God with the epithet "(the) living God," they do so for different ends. In Esther OG, the epithet advances the narrative's agenda of separating Jews from non-Jews by making Jewish worship of their God highly visible. In 3 Maccabees, "living God" language serves primarily not to separate Jew from non-Jew but to distinguish between faithful and apostate Jews. I then turn to both versions of Greek Daniel (OG and TH), narratives in which, I contend, the question of whose god qualifies as "living" is central. The fates of the human characters, whether Jew or gentile, are intimately tied to whether their god is "living" or not. With distinctive uses of the epithet, each novella portrays

Israel's God as the only one whose worship yields human life. Yet, both tales resist ethnic binarism. The "living God" in these two narratives offers life to anyone who serves Israel's God exclusively, regardless of whether the worshiper is ethnically Jewish. In all of these narratives, the epithet continues to serve as a discursive boundary marker which separates Israel's God from all other gods. Thus, in conjunction with the philological shift surrounding *Ioudaios*, which allowed non-Jews to become Jews, there was a simultaneous drive to construct a linguistic barrier around the Jewish God vis-à-vis other gods.

In Chapter Three, I offer my study of the epithet "(the) living God" in *Joseph and Aseneth*, paying special attention to the language and imagery of "life" and "living," which, as I demonstrate, saturate both of the earliest textual forms of this narrative. Since the date and provenance of this text are contested, I suspend historicizing it for purposes of this chapter in order to provide a reading of the narrative first on its own terms. I argue that while *Joseph and Aseneth* employs the biblical epithet "(the) living God" initially to forge boundaries between (Hebrew) Joseph and (Egyptian) Aseneth, the narrative ultimately re-deploys the divine title to rewrite the possibilities for the relationship between Israel's "living God" and gentiles. This text constructs a distinctive theology by invoking Genesis creation language to characterize the God of Israel, "the living God," as the creator – and giver of life – to all, including repentant gentiles. In all of its textual forms, *Aseneth's* story develops a theology of Israel's "living God" which allows for, and even hopes for, gentile inclusion in the people of God.

In Chapter Four, I consider the implications of my findings in Chapter Three for the scholarly questions surrounding the date and provenance of *Joseph and Aseneth*. This discussion is offered as an important first step in historicizing this narrative so that I may, in Chapter Five, develop an argument about the story's significance for studying conversion in ancient Judaism and earliest Christianity. After a review of the principal competing suggestions for the origins of *Joseph and Aseneth*, I contend that the epithet's boundary-marking function in 8:5 contributes further evidence to the case that the story originated as a first-century BCE or first-century CE Jewish document in Greco-Roman Egypt, where the Joseph narrative was used frequently as a platform for Jewish identity negotiation. Such a conclusion sets the groundwork for my claim in the following chapter that the narrative's use of "living God" terminology demonstrates that the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* was a participant in Second Temple period inner-Jewish debates over the possibility of and legitimacy of gentile inclusion in Israel and in Israel's covenant with God.

In Chapter Five, I turn to a comparative examination of the epithet's function in the book of *Jubilees* and in Paul's epistle to the Romans as these authors construct Jewish identity vis-à-vis gentiles. Each of these authors expresses extreme positions towards the relationship of Israel's "living God" to gentiles, and each sets into relief what is distinctive about the theology of *Joseph and Aseneth*. Like *Joseph and Aseneth*, *Jubilees* depicts Israel's "living God" as the creator God, but these texts differ on the implications for gentiles of God's identity as creator: whereas *Joseph and Aseneth* exploits the theme of universal creator to universalize (potential) inclusion, *Jubilees* employs creation

imagery to underscore the exclusivity of the relationship between God and (gentile-free) Israel.

By contrast, Paul employs the epithet in Rom 9:25-26 as biblical warrant for gentile inclusion: gentiles, he says, using language from Hos 2:1 LXX, have now been called “children of the living God.” I argue that *Joseph and Aseneth* and Paul have a strikingly similar understanding of “the living God” and of gentile conversion, and that a comparison of their theologies is therefore mutually illuminating. I suggest, specifically, that they have comparable discursive projects: to construct a “myth of origins” for gentile inclusion.<sup>13</sup> Finally, a comparison of the two myths proves productive for articulating the radical definition of Jewishness which *Joseph and Aseneth* espouses – a definition in which religious practice eclipses ancestry and under which boundaries between Jew and “other” are permeable. It is my hope that these findings, and those of the dissertation more broadly, convincingly position *Joseph and Aseneth* as a narrative which deserves more sustained attention in scholarly discussions of Jewish identity formation in antiquity.

In broad terms, this project as a whole makes two principal interventions in scholarship on *Joseph and Aseneth* and its significance in ancient Judaism. The first is my descriptive reading of the literary features of the story, particularly as the author engages inherited biblical traditions, along with my synthetic conclusions about how those features of the narrative combine to construct a theological stance toward gentile

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<sup>13</sup> I use the term “myth of origins” in a way similar to Caroline Johnson Hodge, whose work on Paul I engage in Chapter Five (*If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2007]).

conversion. Patricia Ahearne-Kroll's recent work on the text of *Joseph and Aseneth*, mentioned above, has challenged previous scholars' exclusive dependence upon either Burchard's or Philonenko's eclectic reconstruction of the text. In my judgment, Ahearne-Kroll's model of approaching the text, which insists that scholars should instead investigate the manuscripts to identify which textual elements are common to both of the earliest streams of transmission (explained in detail in Chapter Three), destabilizes all previous interpretations of *Joseph and Aseneth*. All previous conclusions need to be tested anew. By following Ahearne-Kroll's approach to the text of *Joseph and Aseneth*, I demonstrate that Aseneth's conversion is ubiquitously conceived in terms of movement "from death to life" in the earliest streams of her narrative's transmission. Each family of witnesses, even in moments of idiosyncrasy, employs creation language and imagery from Genesis 1-2 to represent Aseneth's transformation as a re-creation by the creator God.

Given that Aseneth's transformation is a significant piece of her tale, it is no surprise that conversion in *Joseph and Aseneth* has received previous scholarly attention. Before the publication in 1995 of Randall Chesnutt's aptly-titled monograph *From Death to Life: Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth*, scholars focused on Aseneth's conversion principally for history-of-religions purposes. That is, the trend was to isolate and compare specific elements of the process with practices known from other ancient Jewish and Christian religious traditions. Chesnutt's important contribution insists, by contrast, that one cannot properly do comparative analysis without first understanding (1) the function of Aseneth's conversion within the literary fabric of the whole narrative and (2)

the social setting of *Joseph and Aseneth*. Chesnutt argues that the narrative betrays hints of conflict between native-born Jews and gentile converts to Judaism in the world outside the text.

Since Chesnutt's corrective counters a specific tendency in *Joseph and Aseneth* scholarship, much of his work is deconstructive in nature. The present dissertation starts from the ground which Chesnutt has cleared. The focus of my project differs, however, and this is its second principal intervention: I articulate the concept of *God* that the narrative develops (its theology, narrowly conceived) vis-à-vis the conversion of Aseneth (and of gentiles more broadly). I compare the narrative's theology not with contemporary ritual practices but with previous and contemporary positions toward conversion in order to articulate what is distinctive about that of *Joseph and Aseneth*. One of the fundamental concerns of the narrative as Chesnutt conceives it is to address internal Jewish discord regarding the status of converts in the author's community.<sup>14</sup> He points to several pieces of evidence (using Burchard's reconstruction) to support this claim, including the almost tediously detailed portrayal of Aseneth's repentance, which demonstrates her utter sincerity and obviates any doubt about the authenticity of her conversion.<sup>15</sup> In my judgment, it is not the genuineness of the convert which is fundamentally at stake in *Joseph and Aseneth*, but rather, the very nature of Israel's God. This dissertation shows that *Joseph and Aseneth* provides *theological* warrant for the possibility of gentile inclusion through dynamic engagement with the scriptures of Israel

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<sup>14</sup> Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 108-115.

<sup>15</sup> Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 112.

and a creative (re)negotiation of Jewish identity. The narrative does not merely assert a favorable position toward conversion; it explains *how* conversion is possible, and, for this ancient author, it is possible because of who God is.



# CHAPTER ONE

## THE LIVING GOD AND DEAD GENTILES: BOUNDARY-DRAWING IN ISRAEL'S SCRIPTURES

### Introduction

The author of *Joseph and Aseneth* is intimately familiar with the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures and draws freely upon the Septuagint in rewriting the Joseph cycle.<sup>1</sup> In order to interpret this imaginative retelling of the patriarch's story, then, we must seek to understand how this narrative engages inherited traditions and for what purpose. I argue in Chapter Three that *Joseph and Aseneth* borrows, reinterprets, and transforms biblical language and themes, specifically those concerning life and living, in order to promote its own theology of conversion. This chapter is devoted to laying necessary groundwork by focusing on the function of the epithet "(the) living God" in Israel's scriptures,<sup>2</sup> a divine title which all of the earliest forms of *Joseph and Aseneth* take up in reference to the God of Israel.<sup>3</sup> After tracing the history of scholarship on

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<sup>1</sup> Dellling, "Einwirkungen der Sprache," 29-56. See also Docherty, "*Joseph and Aseneth*: Rewritten Bible or Narrative Expansion?," 27-48). In this chapter, I treat both the Hebrew and Greek versions of the text since subsequent chapters address not only (re)interpretations by the Greek-speaking author of *Joseph and Aseneth* (and a host of others, including Paul) but also by the author of *Jubilees*.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term "Israel's scriptures" to refer to the body of work typically called the "Hebrew Bible" or "Old Testament," terms which I to avoid since (1) I treat the Greek translation of biblical texts in addition to the Hebrew, and (2) I do not wish to imply a Christian theological view of these texts as "old."

<sup>3</sup> The textual complexities surrounding *Joseph and Aseneth* receive attention in Chapter Three.

“living God” terminology and outlining my own methodology, I argue that interpreters have overlooked a salient feature of this epithet’s use in Israel’s scriptures: in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, Israel’s “living God” is, in poetic irony, the one who brings *death* to gentiles. The God of Israel is not, of course, categorically opposed to non-Israelites in Israel’s scriptures. Destruction of gentiles is by no means portrayed in every instance as the inevitable result of contact between gentiles and Israel’s God. This reality makes it even more striking that the title “(the) living God” often appears in contexts where gentiles are destroyed. I suggest that the phrase functions in these narratives as a means of forging boundaries between Israel and its God, on the one hand, and gentiles on the other.

### **The Living God in Previous Scholarship**

Biblical scholars and theologians often assume that the meaning of the title “(the) living God” is self-evident: it is treated simply as another, and perhaps more interesting, way to say “the God of Israel” (YHWH). Three exceptions are Hans Kraus, Edward Everding, and Mark Goodwin, who have attempted to remedy this problem by focusing attention on the epithet in the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, postbiblical Jewish literature, and/or early Christian literature.<sup>4</sup> In this introductory section, I outline their principal contributions and their engagement with each other while articulating the ways in which my own approach to the epithet differs.

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<sup>4</sup> Hans J. Kraus, “Der lebendige Gott,” *Evangelische Theologie* 27 (1967): 169-200; Edward H. Everding, “The Living God”; Mark J. Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God: Kerygma and Conversion in 2 Corinthians* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity, 2001).

Kraus' 1967 article proposes to investigate whether or not "living God" is an appropriate descriptor for the God of the Hebrew Bible. The two major interpretive guides that Kraus uses are (1) a history-of-religions focus on the epithet's likely origin in polemics against the dying and rising gods worshiped by other cultures in ancient Israel's environment,<sup>5</sup> and (2) a theological commitment to the general conception of YHWH as the source of life in the Hebrew Bible. The result is that Kraus conceives of the God represented in the Hebrew Bible broadly as "the living God," which he outlines as:

das Reden und Handeln Jahwes in der Geschichte seines Volkes und der Völkerwelt -- auf ein Reden und Handeln, das in souveräner Freiheit und in einer, die Generationen überdauernden, stets gegenwärtigen, immer neu sich erweisenden Bundestreue geschieht.<sup>6</sup>

Kraus thus interprets God's "living" to mean God's active intervention in history. A short examination of New Testament occurrences of the epithet leads Kraus to the conclusion that these are in fundamental continuity with Hebrew Bible uses with the exception of casting the Christ-Spirit event as proof of God's life (*der Lebenserweis*).

Everding and Goodwin are both right to critique Kraus for ignoring the huge body of post-biblical Jewish literature which contains a multitude of examples of "living God" terminology – an oversight which they each seek to correct.<sup>7</sup> A more significant flaw in Kraus' study is methodological, however. As Everding articulates, "[t]he underlying presupposition...that the Old Testament has something to contribute to contemporary

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<sup>5</sup> He thereby confirms Wolf Wilhelm von Baudissin's thesis that "living God" terminology has a Canaanite origin (*Adonis und Esmun: Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte des Glaubens an Auferstehungsgötter und an Heilgötter* [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1911]).

<sup>6</sup> Kraus, "Der lebendige Gott," 190.

<sup>7</sup> Everding, "The Living God," 11; Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 7-8.

theological discussions leads [Kraus] to over-synthesize the evidence and thus overlook some real distinctions in the use of the term.”<sup>8</sup> Kraus does not allow for a history of use and interpretation of the terminology or for the possibility of disparate uses by different authors in various historical settings. He seeks a composite view of “the living God,” thereby flattening any significant variation in the epithet’s usages. I return below to the methodological question of the proper relationship between interpreting individual instances in isolation and synthesizing in order to identify patterns of usage.

Everding’s unpublished 1968 dissertation is the most comprehensive and documentary study of the verb “to live” and adjective “living” as applied to God. He sets out to catalogue each occurrence of the epithet and the oath formula (“as YHWH lives...”) in the literature of ancient Israel, post-biblical Judaism, and early Christianity. Goodwin is right to comment that Everding’s study is so broad that it must be regarded as an important initial step only. The principal fault he finds with Everding’s dissertation is a consequence of its expansive scope, “which was necessarily sweeping in its examination of a wide range of occurrences in a wide variety of sources” and which results in “sometimes cursory and atomistic” treatments of the individual occurrences in isolation from others.<sup>9</sup> Everding’s study leads him to organize “living God” terminology in the Hebrew Bible (he treats special LXX occurrences in a separate chapter), for example, into three categories:

(1) “Victorious over Israel’s enemies” (1 Sam 17:26, 36; Josh 3:10): the “living God” is conceived as a divine warrior king.

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<sup>8</sup> Everding, “The Living God,” 11.

<sup>9</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 8.

(2) “Dreadful power” (Deut 5:26): the epithet emphasizes the “infinite qualitative distinction” between God and humans.<sup>10</sup>

(3) “Superior to other gods” (2 Kings 19:4//Isa 37:4): the epithet appears in the context of idol polemic.

These descriptions are indeed a useful start. Yet, while Everding’s readings are fundamentally correct, they are incomplete due to the limited amount of attention that his comprehensive scope affords each text. I echo Goodwin’s assessment that Everding’s brief examinations of the epithet’s individual occurrences are often so short that they do not yield great interpretive insight.

Yet, Everding’s dissertation represents an important methodological step in the study of the epithet which Goodwin fails to articulate. Everding’s work pushes back against two erring tendencies in previous scholarship. Theologians and biblical scholars, he claims, either (1) lack interpretive constraints – what he calls “controls” – when using the epithet, or they (2) depend too much on only one interpretive constraint, which leads to over-synthesization.<sup>11</sup> His project seeks to mediate between these two extremes.<sup>12</sup>

Everding’s extensive cataloguing, along with syntactical analysis, is a response to critique #1. His response to critique #2 is to outline a fresh objective of such an examination, which is “not to construct a ‘concept’ of the ‘living God’ but to show how the term ‘living God’ is used in view of its various functions, meanings, and Sitze im

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<sup>10</sup> Everding, “The Living God,” 54.

<sup>11</sup> See Everding, “The Living God,” 6.

<sup>12</sup> Since Everding’s dissertation is unpublished and not widely accessible, it has not had a major impact on scholarship. As a result, “living God” terminology is often used today just as loosely as before Everding’s study.

Leben.”<sup>13</sup> Such a commitment to the possibility of multiple valences through time and place is significant: it allows for a history of (diverse) interpretations of inherited traditions.

In my judgment, however, while Everding’s project is successful in offering a solution to critique #1, the way in which he defines “meaning” and “function” hampers his success in demonstrating the history of interpretations of “living God” terminology. Everding states that “[t]he term’s meaning depends on whether it is used in a casual or definable fashion.”<sup>14</sup> I reject Everding’s dichotomy of use as either “casual” or “definable,” since this implies that one can determine the author’s intention (that is, whether the author consciously *meant* to use the terminology). I assume that, regardless of intent, the epithet carries meaning based on its usage, its literary context, its rhetorical effect, and the historical and social circumstances which influenced the works in which it appears. Such an assumption is especially important when we have in view the ways in which later interpreters of Israel’s scriptures might have received “living God” traditions.

Moreover, while I share Everding’s commitment to discerning the *function* of an appearance of “living God” terminology, I use the word differently. Everding employs “function” to mean the epithet’s “usage in various types of literary setting: e.g., affirmations, admonitions, polemics, etc.”<sup>15</sup> I insist, by contrast, that the epithet has a discursive function regardless of its literary setting. A more productive question than in

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<sup>13</sup> Everding, “The Living God,” 14.

<sup>14</sup> Everding, “The Living God,” 14.

<sup>15</sup> Everding, “The Living God,” 14.

which generic context an occurrence appears is what *work* it does in that context. We must ask, then: How does the epithet contribute to the rhetorical and theological goals of the work as a whole? How do other literary features of the works in which it appears give shape to various depictions of the “living God” in each text? These are the guiding questions of my own treatment of the various appearances of the epithet. I argue that the title “(the) living God” is not principally a theological category, but a literary device understood and deployed variously in different literary works with disparate – and sometimes competing – agendas. Only once we have done this work with individual texts can we attempt synthesis.

Mark Goodwin’s *Paul, Apostle of the Living God: Kerygma and Conversion in 2 Corinthians* (2002) also claims that previous scholars’ attempts to describe the meaning of the epithet, including Everding’s, do not show the full picture. In his survey of the scholarly literature pertaining to the epithet, Goodwin points out that a wide consensus accepts an interpretation of “living God” terminology as expressing God’s activity in the world on Israel’s behalf.<sup>16</sup> Goodwin then refines the consensus view by arguing that the biblical epithet more specifically refers to God’s position as the covenantal God of Israel: “The living God’s power and saving activity, manifested in the history of Israel, are expressions of divine covenantal faithfulness, which points to the more fundamental identity of the living God as the covenantal God of Israel.”<sup>17</sup> I find persuasive

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<sup>16</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 15. He offers as examples Kraus, “Der lebendige Gott,” 189-90; Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, trans. David Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 87; Horst D. Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. G. Perdue (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995), 243-44; Raymond F. Collins, *Studies on the First Letter to the Thessalonians* (Leuven: Peeters, 1984), 235.

<sup>17</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 15.

Goodwin's basic point that "living God" terminology has covenantal associations, as the epithet occurs in the context of God's electing Israel, forging a covenant with Israel at Sinai, and giving Israel the Decalogue (Deut 4:33 LXX; 5:26 MT/LXX). Moreover, the epithet's appearances in connection to God's indwelling the ark of the covenant and the Jerusalem Temple further confirm that the title "(the) living God" has covenantal significance (Josh 3:10; Ps 41:3, 83:3; 2 Kings 19:4, 16).

I argue in this chapter, however, that a close examination of the narrative contexts in which the epithet "living God" occurs demonstrates that the covenant is not the primary motif of interpretive significance. While Goodwin's synthetic analysis is the most thorough and perceptive to date, he has overlooked a prominent feature of this epithet's use in Israel's scriptures: frequently, the "living God" is Israel's covenantal God specifically as opposed to gentiles. In fact, the phrase "living God" often appears in contexts in which gentiles are *destroyed*.

As mentioned above, rather than seek a composite description of who "the living God" was in ancient Israel (and in subsequent chapters, ancient Judaism and earliest Christianity), I use narrative-critical tools to ascertain the theology of Israel's "living God" (specifically vis-à-vis gentiles) promoted by each text. I take seriously the probability that individual authors use, complicate, and redefine inherited or existing traditions in the course of their own expressions of the proper relationship between gentiles and the God of Israel (and by extension, Israel). My procedure therefore entails a narrative-critical examination of the epithet's occurrences in Deuteronomy 4 and 5; Joshua 3; 1 Samuel/Reigns 17; and 2 Kings/4 Reigns 18-19, with a focus on the function



of the “living God” terminology within the rhetorical goals and literary features of each passage on its own terms.<sup>18</sup>

It is only after these individual examinations that we may see a pattern emerge: in each of these passages, Israel’s “living God” (1) is conceived as having power over humans’ life/death; (2) appears in contexts in which non-Israelites die or are threatened with death; and (3) participates in the broader aim of drawing ethnic, religious, and/or cultural boundaries around Israel. This chapter thus outlines an overlooked interpretive tradition which associates Israel’s “living God” with dominion over life and death in contexts of the destruction of gentiles. I argue that the authority of “the living God” over who lives and who dies is a means of separating Israel from other nations, and that the epithet therefore functions as a discursive boundary-drawing device, a literary expression of a view of God which constructs a distinction between who is in (“us”) and who is out (“them”/“the other”).

It should be acknowledged at the outset that Israel’s scriptures do not always draw boundaries along ethnic lines, and non-Israelite characters certainly do not meet their end upon every encounter with Israel or the God of Israel. As Terence Donaldson has demonstrated well, ancient Jews often depicted gentiles’ relationship to Jews and to

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<sup>18</sup> The preliminary focus on each individual passage is important. While I think that Goodwin’s thesis is basically right, I find that he too over-synthesizes by failing to allow each appearance (at least initially) to stand on its own terms. For example, he claims that “Deuteronomy 4:33 LXX and 5:26 LXX/MT provide strong indications that the living God is the covenantal God of Israel, something that is confirmed by evidence in Hellenistic Jewish sources” (*Paul: Apostle of the Living God*, 21). In my view, it is better to understand Deuteronomy’s conception of “the living God” on its own terms rather than using evidence from later writers to build an understanding of Deuteronomy’s “living God.” That is, Goodwin’s observation that Hellenistic Jewish authors also portray “the living God” with covenantal significance would be more accurately stated: Hellenistic Jewish authors *take up* a tradition from Deuteronomy. Their interpretations do not *confirm* the epithet’s meaning in Deuteronomy.

Israel's God positively, and the attendant "patterns of universalism" which Donaldson identifies are all present to some extent in Israel's scriptures.<sup>19</sup> In what follows, I trace one competing trend which exists simultaneously with more universalistic tendencies in the Bible. To adapt Donaldson's language: this chapter outlines a pattern of particularism which is present in – but not representative of – Israel's scriptures.

### **The Living God in Deuteronomy**

The epithet occurs in Deuteronomy in the context of God's election of Israel and giving of the Decalogue. Here Israel's "living God" is a frightening God who has power over life and death and who uses that power to separate Israel from other nations. Just after the Decalogue is given in 5:6-21, Moses recalls for Israel their fear at encountering "the living God":

When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you approached me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders; and you said, "Look, the LORD our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the fire. Today we have seen that God may speak to someone and the person may still live. So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer, we shall die. For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God (יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ/θεοῦ ζῶντος) speaking out of fire, as we have, and remained alive (יָחִי/καὶ ζήσεται)? Go near, you yourself, and hear all that the LORD our God will say. Then tell us everything that the LORD our God tells you, and we will listen and do it" (Deut 5:23-27 NRSV).

In Deuteronomy 5, "the living God" is a frightening, fiery presence whose voice imperils those who hear it. Moses reveals that the Israelites are surprised that they remain alive.

The implication of Israel's surprise is that "the living God" is so powerful that those who

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<sup>19</sup> Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135)* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007).

hear this voice usually die. A dichotomy emerges between the Israelites – those who have heard the voice of God and lived – and other nations – “(all) flesh,” who has not.

Implied is that all other people(s) would not live in the face of “the living God.”

This distinction between Israel and all other nations is even more pronounced in the special occurrence of the epithet in Deuteronomy LXX (4:33):

Ask of former days which occurred long before your own, from the day that God created a human being on the earth; ask at the end of the sky up to the end of the sky whether a thing this great has ever happened, whether such a thing has been heard of; whether any nation (ἔθνος) has ever heard the voice of a living god (θεοῦ ζῶντος) speaking from the midst of fire, as you have heard, and you lived (ἔζησας), whether a god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of a nation, by trial and by signs and by wonders and by war and by a strong hand and a high arm and by great exhibits, like all which the Lord your God did in Egypt before you, as you were looking on so that you might know that the Lord your God he is God, and there is no other besides him (Deut 4:33-35 NETS).<sup>20</sup>

The “living God” in this instance is similar to the portrayal in 5:26: dangerous, threatening, ablaze. Israel is once again surprised at their remaining alive after hearing the voice of a God who lives. They see their condition as extraordinary. It is evident that

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth asking why Deuteronomy LXX includes the epithet here where the Hebrew text does not. The adjective’s appearance may be explained by a harmonizing tendency on the part of the translator. John W. Wevers has observed that the LXX translator of Deuteronomy occasionally modifies the text in one place to agree with itself in another (“The LXX Translator of Deuteronomy,” in *IX Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Cambridge, 1995* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997], 78-79). The most striking example is in Deut 1:13: whereas the Hebrew contains three adjectives (חֲכָמִים וְנַבְנִיִּים וְיֹדְעִים) to describe the men whom Moses chooses to help him, only two of these adjectives appear in verse 15 (חֲכָמִים וְיֹדְעִים) to characterize the same people. The Greek translator harmonizes 1:15 with 1:13 by adding ἐπιστήμονας to verse 15, thereby repeating the phrase σοφούς καὶ ἐπιστήμονας καὶ συνετούς from verse 13 and preserving all three adjectives rather than mimicking the Hebrew text’s omission of נַבְנִיִּים in 1:15. It is possible that the translator has similarly added ζῶντος to θεοῦ as a translation of אֱלֹהִים in order to harmonize 4:33 with 5:26, in which the Hebrew reads אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים in an almost identical sentiment about surprise at Israel’s seeing (“the living”) God and yet remaining alive. Everding (“The Living God,” 69) also briefly notes the possibility of this explanation. Admittedly, this option requires the translator knows what is coming in 5:26 since it supposes that an earlier verse has been harmonized to a later one. Whatever the reason for the epithet’s appearance in Deut 4:33 LXX, it deserves close attention here since the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* and (other) Second Temple Greek-speaking Jews would have had access to Greek versions of Israel’s scriptures.

God and Israel have a special relationship since God has chosen Israel, signified in this passage by the Israelites' remaining alive upon encountering the "living God."

The passage indicates that this God is singular as well. This God is the creator of humanity (4:32) who is distinguished from other gods by having chosen a nation (4:34). The uniqueness of the "living God" vis-à-vis other gods and of Israel vis-à-vis other nations receives emphasis here from the threefold repetition of *על*: Israel must ask themselves whether anything so great has happened (4:32), whether any nation has heard and lived (4:33), and whether any god has taken a nation (4:34). This distinctiveness of the "living God" is enhanced further by the use of *אלהים*/*θεός* as the word for God here in combination with "living," since *אלהים*/*θεός* (with or without appositives) is usually reserved for gods other than the God of Israel (Deut 4:7, 28, 34; 5:7, 26; 6:14; 7:4; 8:19; 11:16, 28; 13:2(3), 6(7), 13(14); 17:3; 28:14, 36, 64; 29:26(25); 31:18, 20; 32:17).<sup>21</sup> The adjective "living" thus draws a radical distinction between Israel's God as *אלהים* (*θεός*) and all those other *אלהים* (*θεοί*).<sup>22</sup> Israel's God is separated from other gods by the fact

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<sup>21</sup> This observation is not surprising since these are the usual words for "god" in Hebrew and Greek. Other than in 4:32-33 and 5:24-26, forms of *אלהים* or *θεός* are only used to refer to the God of Israel (in the absence of the tetragrammaton or other modifier) six times in Deuteronomy (9:10; 21:23; 25:18; 32:15, 17; 32:39).

<sup>22</sup> John Wevers has shown that *יהוה* (translated by *κύριος* in the LXX) is the usual name for God in Deuteronomy ("Yahweh and its Appositives in LXX Deuteronomium," in *Studies in Deuteronomy: In Honour of C. J. Labuschagne on the Occasion of His 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, eds. F. Garcia Martinez, A. Hilhorst, J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, A. S. van der Woude [Leiden: Brill, 2004], 269-280). The tetragrammaton appears a total of 561 times, 233 times by itself and 328 with appositives. As Wevers points out, there are a few instances where YHWH in the Hebrew becomes *θεός* (with or without a possessive) rather than *κύριος* (2:15; 4:20; 8:3; 9:26; 26:17; 29:19 [20]; 31:27). Wevers' article focuses on these and other "deviant" translations of YHWH and does not address the appearance in 4:33 LXX of *θεοῦ ζῶντος* as a translation of the Hebrew version's unmodified *אלהים*.

that Israel's God lives, just as Israel is separated from other nations by the fact that they live.

This singular relationship between a special God and a special people coheres with Goodwin's claim that "the living God" is the covenantal God of Israel. Goodwin is right that the fact that Israel lived through "the terrifying encounter" is a "sign of [Israel's] covenantal election."<sup>23</sup> Yet, in my judgment, Goodwin's contextual scope is too broad. The forging of the covenant between God and Israel is indeed at play in Deuteronomy 4 and 5, but the more immediate context is (as outlined above) Israel's fear upon encountering this "living God" and their surprise at remaining alive. The "living God" in Deuteronomy is a God who has power over who lives and who dies, dichotomous fates which expose the fundamental difference between Israel and other nations.

Questions remain, however. In Deuteronomy, what does it mean that Israel "lives"? What does life after an encounter with this "living God" entail? What implications does Israel's life have for those other nations which, as is implied in 5:26 MT/LXX and 4:33 LXX, would meet destruction upon encountering the "living God"? I now turn to answer these questions through an examination of the language of "life" in Deuteronomy, which reveals that, in this book, a condition of Israel's living is the death of non-Israelites (specifically, the inhabitants of Canaan).

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<sup>23</sup> Goodwin, *Paul: Apostle of the Living God*, 19. He acknowledges that God here "manifests himself in terrifying power that threatens death," but Goodwin softens the menace inherent in Israel's surprise by interpreting this divine power as "an expression of divine transcendence" (page 19).

Life, law, and land are inextricably linked throughout the book of Deuteronomy. Language of “life” occurs occasionally in the context of the establishment of cities of refuge (Deut 4:42; 19:4-5) and in the straightforward sense of someone’s being alive and present rather than dead and gone (Deut 5:3; 31:27). But the vast majority of Deuteronomy’s forms of  $\text{חַיָּה/חַי}$  and  $\text{ζάω/ζωή}$  appear in statements that connect Israel’s life and ability to live to (1) their keeping of God’s commands and (2) their occupying and possessing the land of Canaan. For example, in Deut 4:1, Moses tells the Israelites to “listen to the statutes and judgments...in order that you may live ( $\text{וְיִחְיֶינָה לְמַעַן}$  /  $\text{ὅνα ζῆτε}$ ) and “enter (LXX: multiply) and take possession of the land” (my trans.).

The construction  $\text{לְמַעַן}$  or  $\text{ὅνα}$  + a form of the verb  $\text{חַיָּה/ζάω}$  appears at least four more times in connection with both obedience to God’s law and possession of or prosperity in the promised land. In Deut 8:1, Israel is told to obey so that they may “live and multiply and enter and possess the land” (my trans.). Likewise, in 11:8 LXX, Israel must keep the commandments in order that they may “live and enter and possess the land” (my trans.). Similar constructions occur in Deut 16:20 and 30:6-10, 15-20. The lives of the Israelites are here dependent upon their pursuing justice (16:20) and their loving God and walking in his ways (30:16). To choose obedience to the God of Israel is to choose life (30:19-20). The logic here is that Israel should do these things *so that* they may live. Obedience is the means to attain/retain life and to inherit or flourish in the land which God will give them.

Deuteronomy 6:24–7:1-2; 12:1; and 31:13 also associate *חַיָּה*/ζάω with both law and land. The first of these passages is especially relevant for the present study, since it juxtaposes God’s giving the law to the Israelites for their “life” (6:24; *חַיָּה לָהֶם*/ἵνα ζῶμεν) with God’s command to destroy (*תַּחֲרִם*/ἀφανισμῷ ἀφανείας) the seven nations of Canaan when Israel enters the land (7:1-2). Moshe Weinfeld has pointed out that it is the author of Deuteronomy who innovates this ban as a command to annihilate the residents of Canaan during the conquest.<sup>24</sup> Previous laws concerning the Israelites’ dealings with the land’s inhabitants (e.g., Ex 21-23 and Num 33:50-56) forbid the making of covenants and require expulsion *or* destruction without commanding utter annihilation.<sup>25</sup> Deuteronomy 7:1-2 and 20:10-18 are the first instances of the use of the verb *חָרַם* with respect to the Canaanites to command complete annihilation of the population.<sup>26</sup> The key point here is that, for Deuteronomy, Israel’s life – that is, their ability to live – is bound up in obedience to God, which requires destroying non-Israelites in the course of receiving the promised land.

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<sup>24</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, “The Ban on the Canaanites in the Biblical Codes and its Historical Development,” in *History and Traditions of Early Israel: Studies Presented to Eduard Nielsen, May 8th, 1993*, eds. André Lemaire and Benedikt Otzen (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 142-60, esp. 149-54.

<sup>25</sup> Weinfeld, “The Ban on the Canaanites,” 142-49.

<sup>26</sup> Weinfeld, “The Ban on the Canaanites,” 150. Weinfeld notes that this command is utopian in nature, developed retrospectively, since other biblical passages indicate that this command was not completely obeyed (e.g., 1 Kings 9:20-21). In his study on ethnicity and identity in Deuteronomy, Kenton L. Sparks points out that the Canaanite nations in Deuteronomy are “rhetorical others” rather than “objective others” (*Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and their Expression in the Hebrew Bible* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1998], 222-84, esp. 258). That is, by the time Deuteronomy is written in seventh-century Judah, these Canaanite nations are no longer extant and thus do not represent non-Israelites in the author’s own day. Sparks concludes that Deuteronomy’s ethnic constructions are “more rhetorical than actual” and that their function is to establish “a sense of ethnic kinship among Israelites and Judeans” (283). Deuteronomy thus draws boundaries as a means of identity-formation and in-group maintenance.

The language of “life” in Deuteronomy furthermore explicitly characterizes Israel’s God as the one ultimately in control of life and death, which coheres well with my interpretation of Deuteronomy’s “living God” above. In Deut 4:3-4, Moses recalls that God destroyed the men who followed Baal-peor while those who remained loyal to YHWH are all alive today (הַיּוֹם כְּלָכֶם חַיִּים/ζῆτε πάντες ἐν τῇ σήμερον). An even more straightforward example issues from God’s own mouth in 32:39: “See now that I, even I, am he; there is no god besides me. I kill and I make alive (הָאֲנִי אֶחָד וְאֵין עִמָּי/ἐγὼ ἀποκτενῶ καὶ ζῆν ποιήσω); I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver from my hand” (NRSV). The verb appears again in 32:40 as part of the oath formula: “as I live forever” (NRSV).<sup>27</sup> God is the speaker, and the oath indicates that YHWH plans to use sword (32:41) and arrows (32:42) to slay gentile adversaries in acts of vengeance (32:42-43). Blood will flow and flesh will be devoured (32:42). Deuteronomy indeed conceives of this “living God” as giver of life and dealer of death.

In sum, the “living God” in Deuteronomy is a god who has chosen Israel by allowing them to live and who has given them a law by which they must abide in order to continue to live. At the same time, this “living God” is also a potentially ominous deity who has ultimate dominion over life and death. God’s offer of life to Israel has deadly implications for non-Israelites. Goodwin’s claim that “the living God” is fundamentally the covenantal God of Israel is true, but this characterization by itself does not capture the

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<sup>27</sup> Everding notes this appearance as an example of the living God as “divine King who exercises his power to destroy the adversaries of Israel” (“The Living God,” 88). He suggests that the proximity of verse 39 to the oath formula indicates an intentional word play with יָהּ (“The Living God,” 89). Surprisingly, though, Everding does not go further to interpret the epithet’s occurrences in Deuteronomy in light of this language or the oath formula, as I do here.



danger, fear, and potential destruction associated with an encounter with such a God. The more immediate meaning of the epithet in Deut 4:33 (LXX) and 5:26 (MT/LXX) is that Israel's "living God" is the one whose sole prerogative it is to determine who may live (Israel) and who will not (others). The larger context of the language of "life" in Deuteronomy demonstrates further that God has chosen Israel for life and has commanded them to take the lives of the non-Israelites who inhabit Canaan. The usage of the epithet in Deuteronomy, therefore, draws a line between Israel and others – just as it draws a line between Israel's God and others.

Thus, the boundary between Israel and gentiles (specifically Canaanites in this context) is life and death: Israel is the only nation to hear the voice of "the living God" and yet live, and their future life is dependent upon obedience to this God, who commands them to kill the non-Israelites dwelling in Canaan. In the following sections, I show that Joshua, 1 Samuel/Reigns, and 2 Kings/4 Reigns, all of which are part of the Deuteronomistic History, share a similar view of "the living God." The epithet likewise functions in these narratives as a boundary-marker between Israelites and others.

### **The Living God in Joshua**

The book of Joshua is messy. Carnage is everywhere. At the level of the reader's experience of the story, furthermore, the relationships between Israelites and gentiles are messy: the narrative alternatively erects and defies ethnic boundaries. Both types of messiness are important for my discussion of the relationship of "the living God" to

gentiles in this text since, as I discuss below, the epithet occurs in the book of Joshua exclusively within the project of boundary-construction.<sup>28</sup>

Before I develop this thesis, a word about the text of Joshua is necessary. The MT and OG versions of Joshua differ with respect to both scope and content.<sup>29</sup> The Greek version contains more text, for example, in 6:26; 15:59; 16:10; 21:35, 42; and 24:33, while the MT contains more text in 8:12-13 and 20:4-6.<sup>30</sup> The two versions also sequence some events differently: while the MT places the Mount Ebal altar-building just after the conquest of Ai (8:30-35), the Greek translation reports this episode (9:2) before that of the Gibeonites' deception.<sup>31</sup> Scholars today generally agree that the OG translator likely had a Hebrew *Vorlage* different from the MT and that these two versions of Joshua

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<sup>28</sup> One further type of messiness is relevant here: the compositional history of Joshua 3-4 (the narrative of the Jordan crossing on which I focus in this section) is complex (see Brian Peckham, "The Composition of Joshua 3-4," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 [1984], 413-31). For reasons already stated, I treat the final form of the text.

<sup>29</sup> For terminological precision, I use "OG" or "Greek" rather than "Septuagint" or "LXX," reserving "Septuagint/LXX" for the Greek translation(s) of the five books of the Pentateuch. On the potential confusion caused by a broader use of the term "Septuagint," see Leonard J. Greenspoon, "The Use and Abuse of the Term 'LXX' and Related Terminology in Recent Scholarship," *Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 20 (1987), 21-29; Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2000), 30-33.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Rösel, "The Septuagint-Version of the Book of Joshua," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 16.1 (2002), 6-8; see also Lea Mazar, "The Septuagint Translation of the Book of Joshua," *Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 27 (1994), 29-30; and Emanuel Tov, "The Growth of the Book of Joshua in Light of the Evidence of the Septuagint," *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 385-96.

<sup>31</sup> Rösel, "The Septuagint-Version," 6-8; Mazar, "The Septuagint Translation," 29-30.

represent different stages in the book's literary development.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the *Vorlage* of the Greek translation may very well represent a pre-MT form of the book.<sup>33</sup> Since my aim is not to establish an original text, I discuss both the MT and the OG versions of Joshua here. There are no substantial variations between them in the passage immediately surrounding the epithet in chapters 3-4.

Since the book of Joshua narrates the Israelites' divinely-ordained conquest of Canaan, it is perhaps unsurprising that the epithet "living God" is associated with the deaths of non-Israelites. Yet it is not the case that all non-Israelite characters are destroyed in this story. In what follows, I show that while Israelite-Canaanite relations in the book of Joshua are ambivalent, the epithet "living God" appears exclusively in a passage which threatens utter Canaanite destruction and where hard boundaries around Israel are paramount (3:10).

The book of Joshua begins with a series of speeches which draw on material from Deuteronomy, emphasizing that Israel must be obedient to the commands that God gave Moses in order to take possession of the land (Josh 1:1-9, 12-15, 16-18).<sup>34</sup> Yet, as scholars have noted, tension exists in the narrative between the assertion that the

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<sup>32</sup> For the history of scholarship on this issue, see Mazor, "The Septuagint Translation," 30-31. The discovery of the Qumran fragments furnished more evidence for the conclusion that the Greek translation had a *Vorlage* that differed from the MT, since the fragments appear to represent yet another stage in the book's literary development. See Alexander Rofé, "The Editing of the Book of Joshua in Light of 4QJosh<sup>a</sup>," in *New Qumran Texts and Studies*, ed. George J. Brooke (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 73-80; Harry M. Orlinsky, "The Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Septuagint of the Book of Joshua," in *Congress Volume: Rome, 1968* (VTSup 17; Leiden: Brill, 1969), 194-95.

<sup>33</sup> Kristin De Troyer, "Reconstructing the OG of Joshua," in *Septuagint Research: Issues and Challenges in the Study of the Greek Jewish Scriptures*, eds. Wolfgang Kraus and R. Glenn Wooden (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 105-118.

<sup>34</sup> L. Daniel Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled: Contesting Plots in Joshua* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 56-59.

Israelites were completely obedient to the command to annihilate all Canaanite inhabitants (Josh 11:11-12, 15, 23; cf. Deut 7:1-2; 20:10-18) and the narrated events, which feature the sparing of certain Canaanites (e.g., 2:8-21; 6:17, 22-25; 9:19-21, 26-27; 11:13).<sup>35</sup> Two competing relationships between Israelites and non-Israelites are therefore present in the book. The idealized vision of the relationship, in which no Canaanite remains alive, is articulated in the commandment that God gave Moses for the Israelites to spare no one. On the other hand, the actual relationship is more complicated, as both Rahab (2:8-21) and the Gibeonites (9:3-27) cunningly negotiate their own survival. Moreover, the text at times betrays through more subtle indications that Israel did not comply with the commandment to exterminate all inhabitants, some of whom live among them “to this day” (15:63; 16:10). L. Daniel Hawk summarizes nicely the relationship of this tension in the text to the narrative’s complicated and contradictory conception of ethnic boundaries:

Portions of the text make grandiose claims for Israel in the idiom of Deuteronomy, enunciating an intense concern for group survival and the maintenance of internal boundaries. These claims are opposed by a narrated reality represented by episodes and reports that argue for moderation as Israel takes its place among other peoples who inhabit the land. Narrated reality thus resists the imposition of inflexible idealism, engendering a pronounced ambivalence regarding Israel’s identity, status, and relationship to other peoples of Canaan.<sup>36</sup>

The book of Joshua thus constructs boundaries between Israel and others in light of Deuteronomy’s commandments and simultaneously defies ethnic boundaries by sparing

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<sup>35</sup> Hawk’s *Every Promise Fulfilled* (esp. 43-94) provides an excellent survey of the data of these incongruities with respect to the Israelites’ obedience/disobedience to the command concerning the ban. My discussion of the ambivalent portrayal of Israelite-Canaanite relationships is influenced by his work.

<sup>36</sup> L. Daniel Hawk, “The Problem with Pagans,” in *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*, eds. Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn (London: Routledge, 1997), 153.

and thus including outsiders. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to venture an explanation for the ambivalence toward Canaanite annihilation in the book of Joshua. What is most important for the present project is that the single occurrence of the epithet “living God” in this narrative is markedly *unambiguous*: it clearly advances the idealized plot of utter destruction.

In chapter 3, the title character uses the phrase to describe God in a speech preceding the Israelites’ crossing the Jordan River on their way to conquer Canaan: “By this you will know that a living God (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים/θεὸς ζῶν) is among you...” (3:10; my trans.). The Hebrew and Greek diverge slightly at this point. While the MT contains two forms of the verb יָרַשׁ (“to dispossess”) in 3:10 (וְהָיָה יִרְשָׁהּ), the Greek version with its use of the verb ὀλεθρεύω is overt about the fact that God is going to kill: “...and, destroying, he will destroy (ὀλεθρεύων ὀλεθρεύσει) from before our face the Canaanites...” (3:10; my trans.). Joshua then makes a list of the other peoples whom this “living God” will destroy:

וְאֶת־הַחִתִּי וְאֶת־הַחִוִּי וְאֶת־הַפְּרִזִּי וְאֶת־הַגִּרְגָּשִׁי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַיְבוּסִי

καὶ τὸν Χετταῖον καὶ τὸν Φερεζαῖον καὶ τὸν Ευαῖον καὶ τὸν Αμορραῖον καὶ τὸν Γεργεσαῖον καὶ τὸν Ιεβουσαῖον

The repetition of conjunctions וְ (+ direct object marker אֶת) and καί makes the list long and rhythmic: the “living God” will destroy the Canaanites *and* the Hittites *and* the Hivites *and* the Perizzites *and* the Girgashites *and* the Amorites *and* the Jebusites. This is a programmatic statement anticipating the plot of conquest, which ideally requires the annihilation of non-Israelite inhabitants so that no boundaries (of covenant-making or of

idol worship) will be traversed. While some Israelites in Joshua do make covenants with Canaanites (Rahab and the Gibeonites), these plot lines represent boundary crossings which defy this initial agenda-setting proclamation. While the book of Joshua as a whole develops a definition of “otherness” that is not principally delineated along ethnic lines,<sup>37</sup> *this* scene depicts Israel’s God as separating Israel from the Canaanite “other.” The descriptor “living God” shows up nowhere else in the narrative; it is reserved for this context of Israel’s embarking on a mission to destroy these Canaanite nations.

Goodwin argues that the linking of Israel’s “living God” with the ark in Joshua 3 illustrates the epithet’s association with “the theme of divine indwelling as a sign of covenantal faithfulness.”<sup>38</sup> I have suggested that the anticipated execution of the divinely-mandated conquest also conditions the meaning of the epithet here. I now argue that another feature of this passage reveals that the epithet advances boundaries of identity: its emphasis on the miraculous crossing of the Jordan. In 3:10, Joshua announces that it is “by this” (תַּזְזֶנּוּ/ἐν τούτῳ) that the Israelites will know that a “living God” is among them (3:10). While Goodwin assumes that the sign to which Joshua refers is the ark, the object of reference of תַּזְזֶנּוּ/τούτῳ is in fact grammatically

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<sup>37</sup> Lori Rowlett, “Inclusion, Exclusion and Marginality in the Book of Joshua,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 55 [1992], 15-23; see also her monograph entitled *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence: A New Historicist Analysis* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996]). My argument does not challenge Rowlett’s conclusions about the book as a whole, since I emphasize the narrative episode (the crossing of the Jordan in chapters 3-4) in which the epithet appears.

<sup>38</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 32.

ambiguous.<sup>39</sup> A better interpretation understands the entirety of the crossing (by both ark and Israel) as the sign of the presence of Israel's "living God." The crossing of the Jordan is conceived a momentous event, a marvel which Israel commemorates by setting up stones (4:19-24), and an episode which assumes "confessional significance" in the subsequent narrative in Joshua (24:11) and in later tradition (Ps 66:6; Micah 6:4-5).<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the narrative indicates that the Israelites are not the only ones who recognize the significance of God's magnificent work. The fact that Israel's "living God" has dried the Jordan so that Israel can go across is the reason for which the peoples on the other side are now panicked:

And it happened, when the kings of the Amorites, who were beyond the Jordan, and the kings of Phoenicia by the sea heard that the Lord God had dried up the Jordan river from before the sons of Israel when they crossed over, that their hearts melted, and they were panic-stricken, and there was no understanding in them, from before the sons of Israel (5:1 *NETS*).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Everding, who interprets this passage as "holy-war theology," also assumes that the ark is the sign to which Joshua refers, though this claim is not as essential to his reading as it is to Goodwin's ("The Living God," 49). Commentators on the book of Joshua show only passing interest in the question. Trent C. Butler asks, "To what does 'by this' refer?," and comments that it likely refers to verse 11, meaning the ark's passing, but that it could refer to verse 10b, meaning the destruction (*Joshua* [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 7; Waco: Word Books, 1983], 39). A. Graeme Auld accepts the possibility that David's use of "the living God" just before killing Goliath in 1 Samuel may lend support for interpreting the destruction as the sign of God's presence in Joshua 3 (*Joshua: Jesus Son of Naue in Codex Vaticanus* [Septuagint Commentary Series; Leiden: Brill, 2005], 106). The destruction is an unlikely option, however, since the *ʾxal* in 3:10 implies that the Israelites should expect destruction in addition to, and as a corollary to, the presence of the "living God." E. Josh Hamlin, by contrast, assumes that the "this" refers to God's "subduing of the waters" (*Inheriting the Land: A Commentary on the Book of Joshua* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 26). Robert G. Boling writes, "The crossing of the Jordan will be a sign? Yes, and more" (*Joshua: A New Translation and Commentary* [AB 6; Garden City: Doubleday, 1982], 164). He briefly comments that the "more" is "the Sovereign's gracious initiative" (*Joshua*, 164). Richard D. Nelson describes the "this" as the "awe-inspiring standstill of the Jordan's flow, by which Yahweh's presence with Israel is demonstrated (v. 10)" (*Joshua: A Commentary* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997], 59).

<sup>40</sup> Nelson, *Joshua*, 60.

<sup>41</sup> There are no significant differences in the Hebrew text of this verse.

Israel's enemies fear the Israelites and their God because of the passage across the Jordan. The Amorites and Phoenicians understand the threat it poses to them.

The frequency of the appearance of the verbs עבר/διαβαίνω ("to cross") further demonstrates the centrality of the theme of crossing. In the Greek version, forms of διαβαίνω appear no fewer than seventeen times in chapters 1 through 4. This verb appears in verses in which the Israelites' passage through the Jordan is highly anticipated (1:2, 11, 14; 3:1), divinely-accompanied (3:11), and explicitly narrated (3:14, 17 [twice]; 4:12, 13). It appears furthermore when the crossing is used as a marker of time (4:1) and when it is memorialized and retold (4:7, 10, 11 [twice], 22, 23). The MT version's uses of forms of עבר in chapters 1 through 4 is even more impressive, with additional appearances in 1:11 (twice); 3:2, 4, 6, 16; 4:3, 5, 8, 23 (twice). The narrative is thus saturated with language of crossing.

The Israelites' crossing of the Jordan, which Israel's God has miraculously made possible, is thus a significant contextual event which affects the use of the epithet "living God" in 3:10. This interpretive framework is important because while at the surface this episode is a story about breaching a geographical boundary, it is actually much more: this tale of the entry into Canaan is a means by which Israel builds its distinctive identity and simultaneously constructs boundaries around itself as a people. That is, the whole story of the border-crossing functions as a myth of identity-formation which incorporates



boundary-marking.<sup>42</sup> The traversing of the Jordan represents the Israelites' transformation from a wandering people to a landed people:

The Jordan is not just an item of geography, but part of a symbolic system. It represents the boundary between being a landless people and being a nation that possesses a homeland...Understood in this way, the text is less an etiology for a circle of stones than an etiology for the group identity of Israel.<sup>43</sup>

The border-crossing is symbolic of Israel's identity formation as they cross the boundary from "no land" to promised land, a transition which for Joshua (at least ideally) requires destroying the land's non-Israelite inhabitants. This particular episode inscribes discursive boundaries as it defines an (ideal) identity for Israel which requires ethnic separatism: Israel does *not* include the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, or the Jebusites, who can all expect destruction at the hands of Israel's "living God" as a result (3:10).<sup>44</sup> There are thus three types of boundaries in Joshua 3: (1) a physical boundary between Moab and the promised land, (2) a symbolic boundary between divinely-mandated movement and divinely-sustained

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<sup>42</sup> Leonard L. Thompson, "The Jordan Crossing: *Sidqot* Yahweh and World Building," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100.3 (1981), 343-58.

<sup>43</sup> Nelson, *Joshua*, 68.

<sup>44</sup> It is possible that the epithet in Joshua simultaneously functions similarly to its usage in Deut 4:33 LXX, which not only distinguishes Israel from other nations but also separates the "living God" from other gods. J. Michael Thigpen has suggested that Joshua 3 was written as idol polemic specifically against the Canaanite god Baal, whose followers believed to be "living" in the sense of active in life cycles of nature ("Lord of All the Earth: Yahweh and Baal in Joshua 3," *Trinity Journal* 27.2 (2006), 245-54).

stasis,<sup>45</sup> and (3) an ethnic boundary between Israel and non-Israelites. While the first two are permeable, the third – at least in ideal terms in Josh 3:10 – is not.

The epithet “living God” thus appears in the midst of an identity-forming episode which is narrated in a way that is threatening to non-Israelites. The “living God” parts the waters so that Israel can cross into Canaan, an event which both Israelites (3:10) and Canaanites (5:1) recognize as foreboding to the latter. The Jordan-crossing context is therefore pivotal for understanding the way in which the epithet functions in Joshua, since Israel’s “living God” miraculously allows a border breach that initiates the (idealized) plot of destruction of the Canaanites. Furthermore, this God’s participation in the Israelites’ crossing is explicitly viewed as threatening to the non-Israelite inhabitants. While boundary lines in Joshua are not ultimately drawn down lines of ethnicity, the epithet “living God” occurs exclusively in an instance in the narrative where ethnicity *is* determinative for inclusion/exclusion. Once again, then, the “living God” is portrayed as dangerous and fearsome, as the epithet helps to separate Israel from other nations in a programmatic statement about Canaanite destruction.

### **The Living God in 1 Samuel/Reigns**

Perhaps the most famous narrative in which a reference to Israel’s “living God” appears in a context of gentile destruction is that of David and Goliath in 1

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<sup>45</sup> I have here been influenced by Amy-Jill Levine’s turn of phrase, “meaning to movement and stability to stasis,” which appears in an article on a different text about a different movement/stasis (“Diaspora as Metaphor: Bodies and Boundaries in the Book of Tobit,” in *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of, and in Dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel*, eds. J. Andrew Overman and Robert S. MacLennan [Atlanta: Scholars, 1992], 106).

Samuel/Reigns.<sup>46</sup> David uses the epithet as he prepares to fight the mighty Philistine (17:26 MT and 17:36 MT/OG), a member of an ethnic group which, as I discuss below, is this book's ultimate "other." In the Greek version, the epithet occurs once, when David asks Saul regarding Goliath, "Shall I not go and strike him and remove today an insult from Israel? Because who is this uncircumcised one who has reproached the armies of the living God (θεοῦ ζῶντος)?" (17:36; my trans.). The phrase occurs twice in the MT. The first usage is unique to the MT since it appears in the large block of material not found in the Greek version (17:12-31) which narrates David's (almost accidental) introduction to Israel's impending battle with the Philistines. He is present at the front lines to hear Goliath's taunts only because he has taken a break from his shepherding to bring supplies to his brothers in the army. After hearing Goliath's challenge for man-to-man combat, David asks of the Israelites around him: "What will be done for the man who will smite this Philistine and will take away a reproach from Israel, for who is this uncircumcised Philistine who has reproached the armies of the living God (אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים)?" (17:26; my trans.). Subsequently, in 17:36 (which parallels the epithet's appearance in the Greek version), David uses the epithet again when he proclaims to Saul

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<sup>46</sup> The Old Greek version of this narrative is significantly shorter than the MT account and may represent an earlier stage in the narrative's development. The relationship between these versions has been the subject of much scholarly conversation, as the joint research venture undertaken by D. Barthélemy, D. W. Gooding, J. Lust, and E. Tov exemplifies (results published in *The Story of David and Goliath: Textual and Literary Criticism. Papers of a Joint Research Venture*. Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986]). For a summary of each of their positions and methodologies, see Arie van der Kooij, "The Story of David and Goliath: The Early History of its Text," *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses* 68 (1992), 119-21. See further A. Graeme Auld and Craig Y. S. Ho, "The Making of David and Goliath," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 56 (1992), 19-39, and the literature cited therein. It is beyond the scope of my project to weigh in on the relationship between the two versions. In this section, I consider the epithet's function in both versions of the story, focusing on the narratives' shared literary features.

that he himself will kill the Philistine “because he has reproached the armies of the living God (אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים)” (my trans.).

Interpreters usually characterize the epithet’s usage(s) here as an example of “the living God” as a powerful divine warrior who actively fights on Israel’s behalf and who is therefore superior to the gods of Israel’s enemy.<sup>47</sup> This characterization is correct but incomplete. Contextualizing David’s reference to “the living God” both within its immediate narrative unit and within the border-maintenance concerns of 1 Samuel/Reigns as a whole demonstrates that the epithet once again functions as a discursive boundary marker between Israel and non-Israelites.

The oath formula (“as the Lord lives...”) which is related to the epithet “(the) living God” occurs frequently in 1 Samuel/Reigns in conjunction with various characters’ discussing and/or making decisions about whether someone will live or die (14:45; 19:6; 20:3, 25:26, 33-34; 26:10, 16; 28:9-10; cf. 20:22).<sup>48</sup> It is unsurprising, therefore, that the narrative associates the epithet “the living God” with the dichotomy of life and death. The story in which the epithet appears is not shy about its spotlight on violence and fatality. Goliath challenges Israel to a duel (17:9), and David invokes his shepherding experience as evidence of his readiness to fight (17:35 [2x], 36).<sup>49</sup> The shepherd boy

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<sup>47</sup> Goodwin, *Paul: Apostle of the Living God*, 32, 67. Cf. Kraus, “Der lebendige Gott,” 185-86.

<sup>48</sup> Everding points out this connotation of the oath formula but curiously does not allow it to inform his understanding of the epithet construction of “living God” terminology (see “The Living God,” 82) (cf. 1 Kg 2:24; Jer 38:16). Citing Num 14:21, 28; Jer 22:24; Ezekiel 5:11; 14:16, 18, 20; 17:16, 19; 18:3-4; 33:11, 27, Everding also observes that when YHWH speaks the oath formula in the Hebrew Bible, it is “to introduce a judgment which usually involves the punishment of death” (“The Living God,” 82-86).

<sup>49</sup> In the block of material unique to the MT, נכה appears additionally in 17:25, 26, and 27.

vividly describes for Saul his gruesome slaying of wild animals which preyed on his sheep:

Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it (17:34-35 NRSV).

Your slave was tending the flock for his father, and when the lion and the bear would come and take a sheep from the herd, and I would go after it, then I struck it and pulled from its mouth, and if it turned against me, then I caught it by its throat and struck it down and put it to death (17:34-35 *NETS*).

David has killed before. The next verse, in which David says that Goliath will be like the lion and the bear, foreshadows the Philistine's impending demise (17:36).

The reader must wait, however, for David's confident assertion of Goliath's death to play out in the narrative. Before the fight, David and Goliath threaten each other, verbally illustrating the other's end. The way in which David imagines the Philistine's death is particularly grisly (17:46): not only does the Israelite plan to kill

(וְהִכְתִּי/ἀποκτενῶ) his opponent, but he will also remove his head and feed the

Philistines' army's corpse (OG: Goliath's limbs and those of his compatriots) to bird and beast. David indeed kills his opponent (17:49). While the first blow issues from a slingshot (17:49), the subsequent scene is gruesome, as David decapitates the Philistine with a sword (17:51).<sup>50</sup> Death and destruction thus also surround the appearance of "the living God" in 1 Samuel/Reigns.

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<sup>50</sup> I return below to the significance of the decapitation, an instantiation of violence that might appear gratuitous at first glance.

I now move to a discussion of *whose* death and of what is really at stake in the tale beyond the triumph of an underdog hero. Goliath is an enemy of Israel, but he is one with communal dimensions who represents a people group from whom the narrative takes care to distinguish the Israelites. A close reading of 1 Samuel/Reigns 17 reveals that ethnic distinction and separatism are fundamental concerns of the story. While the tale is popularly known as the story of “David and Goliath,” it might also be appropriately termed “David and the Philistine/foreigner.” The opening scene sets up an adversarial dichotomy between the Philistines and the Israelites. The first three verses establish the opposition, with the Philistines gathering their armies in verse 1 and with Saul and “the men of Israel” gathered “opposite the Philistines (פְּלִשְׁתִּים/ἀλλοφύλων)” in verse 2. (Throughout this passage, the Greek version uses forms of the word ἀλλόφυλος [“foreigner”] to translate “Philistine,” a move which functionally erases the ethnic particularity of the Philistines and suggests an understanding of their role in the story as the ultimate “other,” a point to which I return below.) Verse 3 provides a summary which paints a vivid picture of the two armies separated by a vast space: “And the Philistines stood on the mountain here, and Israel stood on the mountain there, and the valley was between them” (17:3; my trans.). There is no intermingling as they are poised for conflict. There is a literal valley between them.

Verse 4 introduces the main opponent, Goliath. Though he is here called by name, the narrator calls him “the Philistine” (MT) or “the foreigner” (OG) for the rest of the story (with the exceptions of 17:23 [MT only] and 17:42). Goliath is thus primarily identified throughout the tale either in terms of his ethnicity (MT) or as a representative

of a universal “other” (OG). This identification, which occurs in quick succession fourteen times in the Greek and seventeen times in the Hebrew, is difficult to miss, as the following chart demonstrates:

<u>Verse(s)</u>	<u>Reference(s) to Goliath as “the Philistine/foreigner”</u>
17:10	Goliath issues a challenge: “And <i>the Philistine/foreigner</i> said...”
17:11	Saul and all Israel “heard these words of <i>the Philistine/foreigner</i> .”
17:32	David volunteers to Saul that he will go and “fight with <i>this Philistine/foreigner</i> .”
17:33	Saul challenges David’s ability “to go against <i>the Philistine/foreigner</i> .”
17:36	David says that “ <i>the uncircumcised Philistine/foreigner</i> ” will be like the wild animals he has killed.
17:37	David predicts that God will deliver him from “the hand of <i>this</i> [OG: <i>uncircumcised</i> ] <i>Philistine/foreigner</i> .”
17:40	Armed with staff, stones, and sling, David advances against “ <i>the Philistine/foreigner</i> .”
17:43	“[T] <i>he Philistine/foreigner</i> ” scoffs at David’s weapons, and “ <i>the Philistine/foreigner</i> curse[s] David by his gods.”
17:44	“[T] <i>he Philistine/foreigner</i> ” threatens to feed David to the birds and wild animals.
17:45-47	David in turn threatens “ <i>the Philistine/foreigner</i> ” who has reproached Israel’s God.
17:48	“[T] <i>he Philistine/foreigner</i> ” comes forward to meet David. MT: David then comes forward to meet “ <i>the Philistine</i> .”
17:49	David strikes “ <i>the Philistine/foreigner</i> ” with a stone.
17:50 (MT)	The narrator summarizes that David has prevailed over “ <i>the Philistine</i> ” and struck and killed “ <i>the Philistine</i> .”
17:51 (MT)	David stands over “ <i>the Philistine</i> ,” kills him with a sword, and beheads him.
17:54	David takes “the head of <i>the Philistine/foreigner</i> ” to Jerusalem.

Furthermore, it is not only David and the narrator who make this explicit distinction.

Goliath does so as well: in his challenge to his enemy, he asks, “Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul?” (17:8 MT; my trans.). The Greek version makes the

ethnic distinction more overt: “Am I not an allophyle, and are you not *Hebrews* of Saoul?” (17:8; my trans.).<sup>51</sup> The reader cannot miss the stark dichotomy.

Goliath’s recurring identification as “the Philistine/foreigner” has two effects: (1) it underscores his function as a representative of the Philistine nation (MT) or of all foreigners (OG); and (2) it advances the narrative’s concern to separate Israel from Philistia (or all foreign nations) and other gods by pointing out Goliath’s otherness. David’s descriptor of Goliath as “the uncircumcised one” further illustrates the latter concern: Goliath’s uncircumcision is what distinguishes the Philistine’s body from the Israelites while simultaneously representing his religious otherness as one who does not worship Israel’s covenantal God.

And Goliath’s penis is not only the only part of his body which receives description in this story. In fact, the attention given to Goliath’s body in the narrative suggests that the body here functions as a site of cultural inscription. The height of Goliath’s body is one of the first details given of the Philistine (17:4). The narrator then invites the reader to imagine Goliath’s body bit by bit as each piece of his armor is described: the helmet on his head, the breastplate on his chest, the bronze greaves on his

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<sup>51</sup> This change is likely due to the translator’s confusing the Hebrew letter ד (in עבדים; “servants”) for ר (עברים; “Hebrews”).



legs, the javelin between his shoulders, the spear (presumably) in his hands (17:5-7).<sup>52</sup> Goliath thus embodies the military threat of Philistia.<sup>53</sup>

Yet the danger of Goliath's body is not limited to the physical threat he poses. The military threat also imperils the boundaries of Israel's religious and cultural identity as worshipers of YHWH alone. It is the giant Philistine who sets the terms of the man-to-man fight (17:8-9), and in the same breath he negotiates the consequences for the defeated nation once combat has separated winners from losers: if Israel's man kills him, the Philistines will become servants/slaves (עֲבָדִים/δούλους) of Israel, and if Goliath prevails, the Israelites will become servants/slaves (עֲבָדִים/δούλους) of the Philistines *and will serve them* (עֲבָדִים/δουλεύσετε). Goliath thus characterizes the consequences of an Israelite loss differently by repeating the idea of service to Philistia.<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere in 1 Samuel/Reigns, the verbs עָבַד and δουλεύω are used most frequently to describe service to God/gods (2:24 [OG]; 7:3, 4; 8:8; 12:10 [twice], 14, 20, 23 [OG], 24; 26:19), and so Goliath's words suggest to the reader that if David were to be defeated, Israel would serve not only the Philistines but their gods as well.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Mark K. George, "Constructing Identity in 1 Samuel 17," *Biblical Interpretation* 7.4 (1999), 395.

<sup>53</sup> Drawing on the Foucauldian notion that "bodies become meaningful when they are inscribed and invested with discourses constructed by societies within which they live and circulate," Mark K. George points out that Goliath is representative of his nation in part because his imposing military body, which is described in great detail, represents the threat which the Philistines pose to Israel ("Constructing Identity," 394-96 [quotation from 394]).

<sup>54</sup> George, "Constructing Identity," 397.

<sup>55</sup> George makes this same basic claim by making an analogy with the events of 1 Sam 5:1-2, when the Philistines put the captured ark – an embodiment of YHWH – in Dagon's temple after defeating the Israelites ("Constructing Identity," 398).

The sharp contrast drawn in the beginning of the narrative between Israel and the Philistine “other” (17:1-3) is thus in jeopardy. Goliath’s challenge to Israel functions as a challenge to Israel’s distinctiveness – its boundedness – as a community charged with serving only one God, their God. Moreover, at the level of the reader, Goliath’s body is a fitting symbol of this threat to the borders of Israel’s identity, for his body is itself transgressive. His giant form exists liminally between human and monster, between familiar and other.<sup>56</sup> David’s defeat of the Philistine is therefore a victory over more than a single warrior with a scary weapon. The Israelite’s decapitation of Goliath quells three interrelated threats: (1) the Philistine military threat to Israel’s continued survival, (2) the threat to Israel’s autonomous religious identity; (3) the threat to the very viability of the notions of categorization and proper boundaries. His decapitation is a vivid destruction of a body which is a literal, physical threat to Israel’s well-being and independence and a symbolic threat to boundary-maintenance because of its ambiguity, its embodiment of boundaries transgressed. Israel’s identity as separate from another nation and its gods is therefore fundamentally at stake in this narrative.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, Goliath is not the only Philistine figure who loses his head in this book. The statue of the Philistine god Dagon is severed at the head and hands (5:4) after

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<sup>56</sup> I have been influenced here by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (*Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* [Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1999]), who points out that the Nephilim in Genesis embody the transgression of boundaries: “the giants are the organic realization of a primal miscegenation: angels mix with humans, and the purely spiritual touches flesh” (page 30).

<sup>57</sup> Since the agenda of the entire work of Samuel is to tell the story of Israel’s transition to rule by monarchy, the narrative of David and Goliath may also contribute to Israel’s self-definition by explaining/justifying the rise of the Davidic monarchy; David, the one anointed by God for the throne, is not only pitted against Goliath, but is also contrasted with Saul, the existing king who no longer has God’s favor and who is afraid of Goliath’s threat. See Antony F. Campbell, “From Philistine to Throne (1 Samuel 16:14-18:16),” *Australian Biblical Review* 34 (1986), 35-41.

the Philistines capture the Israelites' ark in battle and put it in Dagon's temple (4:1-5:2).<sup>58</sup> Drawing on anthropologist Mary Douglas' argument that "a culture's concerns about the human body reflect its concerns about the social body,"<sup>59</sup> Trude Dothan and Robert L. Cohn have suggested that the repetition of the motif of bodily mutilation (also present in the Samson cycle in Judges 13-16 and in David's removal of Philistine foreskins in 1 Samuel 18:27) reveals the Israelites' concern for border control vis-à-vis the Philistines.<sup>60</sup> They propose reading the narrative's concern for "bodily extremities, the 'borders' of the body" in terms of a "fear of territorial invasion," given that the Philistines and Israelites "clashed repeatedly in the undefined border area between them."<sup>61</sup> While these authors mention a geographical border area, it is more productive for my purposes, and, I suggest, more faithful to the concerns of the narrative itself, to consider the bodily mutilation theme as expressing concern over the borders of Israelite ethnic and cultural/religious identity. As I have shown, ethnic separatism and distinction are key concerns of the story of "David and the Philistine/foreigner," and Goliath's body is representative of more than just the Philistine nation. David's mutilation of a Philistine body facilitates the definition

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<sup>58</sup> Goliath and Dagon also share in common a fall to the face before David/the ark, invoking a praying position before the respective symbol of YHWH in each story, a position which suggests their subservience to the (superior) God of Israel (J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses*, Vol. 2: *The Crossing Fates* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986], 18; George, "Constructing Identity," 406-07).

<sup>59</sup> Mary Douglas writes that "[t]he body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious" (*Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* [London: Routledge, 2002 (orig. 1966)], 142).

<sup>60</sup> Trude Dothan and Robert L. Cohn, "The Philistine as Other: Biblical Rhetoric and Archaeological Reality," in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, ed. Laurence J. Silberstein (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 65.

<sup>61</sup> Dothan and Cohn, "The Philistine as Other," 65.

of borders, constructing boundaries between Israelites and the uncircumcised Philistines and defending the very idea of boundary-maintenance.

It bears repeating at this point that David uses the epithet “the living God” in his characterization of the challenge posed by Goliath: by threatening the borders of Israel’s identity, Goliath has “reproached the armies of the living God” (17:36; my trans.). There is thus a close association here of (1) a gentile challenge to Israel’s distinct identity with (2) an Israelite’s border-maintenance through the death of a (representative) gentile who embodies both otherness and boundary transgression, and (3) a description of Israel’s God as “the living God.” The narrative of David and the Philistine, then, is another example of the epithet’s discursive boundary-drawing. The Israelite lives; the non-Israelite, who has threatened Israel’s borders, dies. Once again, “the living God” is associated closely with Israel against a gentile, who is marked explicitly so by the derogatory use of הָעֵרֶל/ἀπερίτμητος, in a narrative context of life/death which is simultaneously concerned with maintaining borders around what is perceived to be Israel’s distinctive identity.

### **The Living God in 2 Kings/4 Reigns**

The epithet also occurs in the Assyrian crisis narrative in 2 Kings/4 Reigns 18-19, in which “the living God” appears on the lips of Judahite characters describing their God

as the object of gentile reproach (2 Kings/4 Reigns 19:4, 15).<sup>62</sup> The OG recension of this section of 2 Kings (4 Reigns) represents a close, wooden translation of the Hebrew version preserved in the MT, so the narrative-critical observations I offer in this section apply equally to both the Hebrew version and the Greek translation.<sup>63</sup> Though scholarship on 2 Kings 18-19 has long been focused either on (1) its compositional history<sup>64</sup> or (2) its historicity,<sup>65</sup> I offer here a synchronic reading of the final form of the text as it would have been received by subsequent Jewish and Christian writers.<sup>66</sup> I show

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<sup>62</sup> These two appearances of the epithet are also in Isaiah's parallel narrative in chapters 36-39 (the epithet occurs in 37:4, 17). The relationship between these two parallel but not identical Hezekiah-Sennacherib stories is uncertain. For a summary of the history of scholarship on their synoptic relationship, see Christopher R. Seitz, "Isaiah, Book of (First Isaiah)," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 482-83. The focus of the present study – that is, the function of "living God" terminology in these narratives – invites an evaluation of either story without judgment of which is prior. In this chapter, I treat the 2 Kings version, since the relationship of Isaiah 36-39 to the rest of the book is a complicated and much-debated issue, one that has only recently received sustained scholarly attention (see P. R. Ackroyd, "Isaiah 36-39: Structure and Function," in *"The Place is Too Small for Us": The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship*, ed. Robert P. Gordon [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995], 478-494). It will suffice to point out the significant similarities of the Isaiah version with that of 2 Kings which suggest that the epithet "the living God" functions in a way that is analogous to its usage in 2 Kings: (1) the Rabshakeh's challenges (spoken in the language of Judah), which parody the Deuteronomic promise of land and suggest that YHWH, like all other gods, is impotent (Isa 36:4-20; 37:8-13); (2) Hezekiah's characterization of these challenges as mocking "the living God" (Isa 37:4, 17); (3) the subsequent death of Assyrian troops and king, arranged and/or carried out explicitly by God or the representative of God (Isa 37:6-7, 36-38).

<sup>63</sup> See John W. Wevers, "Principles of Interpretation Guiding the Fourth Translator of the Book of the Kingdoms (3 K. 22:1 – 4 K. 25:30)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 14.1 (1952), 40-56. As Wevers points out, the only variation of significance is the OG's use of "Samaria" instead of "Israel" in 18:11, presumably to correct a perceived historical error, since Assyria did not completely depopulate the Northern Kingdom ("Principles of Interpretation," 48).

<sup>64</sup> See Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1967), 69-103.

<sup>65</sup> For a helpful summary of both of these issues in the history of scholarship, see Danna Nolan Fewell, "Sennacherib's Defeat: Words at War in 2 Kings 18.13-19.37," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34 (1986), 87-88 n. 1 and n. 2.

<sup>66</sup> For a recent summary of the history of diachronic and synchronic scholarly approaches to this narrative, see Paul S. Evans, "The Hezekiah-Sennacherib Narrative as Polyphonic Text," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33.3 (2009), 336-40.

that the epithet is again associated with God's power over life/death, destruction of gentiles, and boundary-construction.

The narrative opens with a sweeping statement of superlatives about Hezekiah, the king of Judah, in 18:3-5. He is singled out as the best Judahite king because of his hope in YHWH and his destruction of the high places: "after him there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah or those who came before him" (18:5; my trans.). The reader is thus already anticipating that Hezekiah's subsequent words and actions are good and right. Hezekiah has been obedient to God, and "the Lord was with him" in everything (18:7; my trans.), including his rebellion against the Assyrians. The reader then discovers that Assyria has defeated Samaria (18:10) and has sent Israel (OG: Samaria) into exile (18:11) "because they did not listen to the voice of the Lord their God but transgressed his covenant" (18:12; my trans.). The Assyrians, under Sennacherib, come for Judah a number of years later (18:13). Hezekiah's initial attempt at maintaining peace by complying with a tribute (18:14-16) is ultimately unsuccessful, as the reader discovers that Sennacherib has sent emissaries with a "heavy power" against Jerusalem (18:17). Because the reader knows that Hezekiah, unlike the people of the Northern Kingdom, has been obedient to God, he or she expects God's deliverance.

Rescue is not immediate, however. First there is a contest – what Danna Nolan Fewell has rightly called a "war of words" – which pits Sennacherib against YHWH in a dispute over who will rule Judah and offer life to its people.<sup>67</sup> The Rabshakeh, the Assyrian king's representative, taunts the Judahites by suggesting that they defect and

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<sup>67</sup> Fewell, "Sennacherib's Defeat," 79-90.

“make a wager with [his] master, the king of Assyria” (18:23; my trans.) since it is God – Israel’s God – who told him to “go up against this land and destroy it” (18:25; my trans.). Representatives of Judah (named previously in 18:18) then chide the Rabshakeh because he has apparently been speaking in “Judean,” that is, the mother tongue of the Judahites, rather than “Aramaic,” which these representatives, but presumably not most of the Judahite people listening in, are able to understand (18:26).<sup>68</sup> Though the reason that the Judahite representatives make this request is not explicit in the narrative, the most natural explanation is that they do not want their community to understand the Assyrian taunts because they fear that the taunts will be effective.<sup>69</sup>

The Rabshakeh ignores their appeal, continuing in the language native to Judah so that everyone can understand him. He urges the people to refuse Hezekiah’s leadership in favor of surrendering to Assyrian exile, which he makes sound extremely appealing:

Make with me a blessing and come out to me and each one will eat (OG: drink) from his vine, and each one (OG: will eat) from his fig tree, and each one will drink from his cistern until I come and take you to a land like your land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive oil and honey, that you may live and not die (וְלֹא תָמוּתוּ/καὶ ζήσετε καὶ οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνητε; 18:31-32; my trans.).

The emissary here speaks the Judahites’ language in both form and content. He not only converses in “Judean,” their literal language, but he is “speaking their language” in the

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<sup>68</sup> See Walter Brueggemann, “II Kings 18-19: The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 7.1 (1985), 4-9.

<sup>69</sup> The reader at this point already knows that the Rabshakeh’s claims are feeble: whereas the Assyrian claims that Judahites cannot trust Hezekiah because he removed the high places (18:22), the narrator’s high praise of this very act (18:4) in addition to the positive evaluation of Hezekiah in broad strokes at the beginning of the story (18:5-7) reveal the Rabshakeh’s allegation to be false. The Judahites in the story do not have the benefit of this foreshadowing, though, and they therefore may not have the tools to recognize the Rabshakeh’s lies for what they are.

colloquial sense of articulating ideas that are close to home in vocabulary that is utterly familiar. He thus speaks their religious language too: his speech includes extensive verbal resonances with expressions in both the Pentateuch and the prophets.<sup>70</sup> The most poignant connection for my purposes here is that the Rabshakeh offers Judah both a prosperous land and a choice between life and death, much like YHWH offers to Israel in Deuteronomy (land in 7:13; 8:8; life in 30:19).

The Rabshakeh tells them, furthermore, not to believe that their God will deliver them, for no other god has delivered any nation from the powerful Assyria: “Has any of the gods of the nations delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria?...Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their land from my hand that the Lord (YHWH; OG: κύριος) will deliver Jerusalem from my hand?” (18:33, 35; my trans.).<sup>71</sup> On behalf of Sennacherib, then, the Rabshakeh offers life to Judah while in the same breath denying that their God will save them from the Assyrians.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Dominic Rudman, “Is the Rabshakeh also Among the Prophets? A Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings XVIII 17-35,” *Vetus Testamentum* 50.1 (2000), 103-08. See also P. R. Ackroyd, “An Interpretation of the Babylonian Exile: A Study of 2 Kings 20, Isaiah 38-39,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 27.3 (1974), 348; Ehud Ben Zvi, “Who Wrote the Speech of Rabshakeh and When?,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109.1 (1990), 79-92.

<sup>71</sup> Everding interprets the two 2 Kings/Isa 37 appearances of the epithet under the rubric “‘The Living God’: Superior to Other Gods,” noting the implicit polemic against “the powerless ‘gods of the nations’” in this passage (“The Living God,” 58, 60). He denies, however, that the term “living” has a “special polemical interpretation” since the other gods are not described as “dead” (“The Living God,” 60, 61).

<sup>72</sup> Fewell is right to point out that Sennacherib is claiming that he can control life and death (“Sennacherib’s Defeat,” 86-87). She characterizes the whole story as one which “depicts the deliverance of Jerusalem to be Yahweh’s assertion of autonomy over life and death in the face of the Assyrian counter-claim” (page 87).



Hezekiah characterizes these taunts as mocking “the living God.” He retreats to the Temple and sends messengers to the prophet Isaiah, whose counsel he seeks. The messengers relay his plea:

Thus says Hezekiah: “A day of distress and chastisement and contempt is this day...Perhaps the Lord your God will hear all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria, his lord, sent to mock the living God (רַב־שָׁקֵחַ/θεδν ζῶντα) and he will rebuke the words which the Lord your God heard” (19:3-4; my trans.).

Mocking “the living God” is here equated with claiming that: (1) God cannot deliver Judah because no other nation’s god has been able to defeat Assyria; and (2) the king of Assyria offers life to Judah by bringing them to a prosperous land. These two taunts challenge the Deuteronomic characterization of “the living God,” which, as I have shown, understands this God as (1) distinct from other gods by virtue of holding dominion over life and death, and as (2) offering life to Israel by promising them a prosperous land. The king of Assyria, then, mocks “the living God” here precisely by challenging two characteristics of “the living God” as portrayed in Deuteronomy.

The interpretation of this story as a contest over who truly has dominion over life and death receives confirmation from a previous episode in 2 Kings/4 Reigns. There is a similar dispute, this time between YHWH and another god, in chapter 1. Ahaziah becomes sick after falling and wonders whether he will succumb to his illness (1:2). He sends messengers to “Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron,” asking them to inquire of the god whether or not he will live (וְהָאֱלֹהִים/εἰ ζήσομαι ἐκ τῆς ἀρρωστίας μου ταύτης).

An angel of YHWH instructs Elijah to intervene and to pose a damning question which reveals that YHWH is incensed that Ahaziah has sent his messengers to any god but the

God of Israel: “Is it because there is no god in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?” (1:3; my trans.) At this point the Greek text contains an extra phrase which makes God’s displeasure explicit: “it shall not be so” (1:4). YHWH immediately asserts control over life and death, communicating through Elijah that Ahaziah “shall surely die” (תָּמוּת מוֹת/θανάτῳ ἀποθανῆ; 1:4). And he does (1:17). 2 Kings/4 Reigns thus maintains that YHWH – and only YHWH – determines life and death.

The second occurrence of the epithet “the living God” in the Hezekiah story occurs in a context similar to that of the first. The Rabshakeh sends messengers to Hezekiah with the same message as his previous speech, urging the king not to trust in his God to rescue Jerusalem from Assyria because all other gods have thus far failed to deliver their nations (19:8-13). Hezekiah utters the epithet as he prays for deliverance: “hear the words of Sennacherib, which he sent to mock the living god (יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי חַי/θεὸν ζῶντα)” (19:16; my trans.). Just previously, Hezekiah has opened his prayer with a series of appellations for the divine, addressing God as “the God of Israel,” “God alone in all the kingdoms of earth,” and the one who “has made heaven and earth” (19:15; my trans.). He thus does not use “living God” in his descriptors until he explicitly mentions the

Assyrian aggressors. The immediate context of the epithet overtly puts “the living God” in an adversarial relationship to non-Israelites.<sup>73</sup>

Hezekiah’s pleas appear to be effective, for the next speaker is God (through the prophet Isaiah), who returns Assyria’s taunts (19:20-34). As Fewell notes, in an ironic reversal, God “becomes the taunter, the threatener, the punisher, and the destroyer.”<sup>74</sup> Israel’s “living God” then demonstrates dominion over life and death by slaughtering the Assyrian troops. The angel of the Lord kills (ἄγγελος ἐπάταξεν) 185,000 Assyrians while they sleep. Only dead corpses (מֵתִים פְּגָרִים/σώματα νεκρά) remain the next morning (19:35-36). Moreover, it is revealed that God will cause Sennacherib’s death by the sword when the king returns to Assyria (19:7), which is indeed the precise manner of Sennacherib’s demise (19:36-37).

The narrative of 2 Kings/4 Reigns 18-19 insists that it is Israel’s “living God” – and not an Assyrian king – who brings life to Israel and death to non-Israelites. Interpreters are right to characterize “the living God” as the divine warrior who fights for Israel.<sup>75</sup> They have overlooked, however, one of the most conspicuous contextual features of the epithet here: Israel’s “living God” is the adversary – and destroyer – of gentiles who challenge not only this God’s dominion over life and death, but also Judah’s

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<sup>73</sup> This time, furthermore, it is explicit that Israel’s God, as the “living God,” is distinct from other nations’ gods, as Hezekiah draws a sharp contrast: “For truly, O Lord, the Assyrians’ kings laid waste the nations and gave their gods into the fire, for they were no gods but works of human hands – wood and stone – and they destroyed them” (19:17-18). Such a contrast may be a precursor to later Jewish idol polemic (discussed below in Chapter Three). See Everding, “The Living God,” 58-63.

<sup>74</sup> Fewell, “Sennacherib’s Defeat,” 82.

<sup>75</sup> For example, Everding, “The Living God,” 60.

physical border and autonomous social and religious identity. Once again, the epithet “the living God” occurs in a narrative context of gentile destruction and participates in the construction of boundaries between the people of YHWH and another nation.

### **Synthesis and Conclusions**

In each of these narratives, the epithet “(the) living God” is accompanied by gentile death. Deuteronomy 4 (LXX) and 5 (MT/LXX) imply other nations’ demise at hearing the voice of Israel’s “living God.” In Joshua 3, seven Canaanite nations are threatened with destruction. In 1 Samuel/Reigns 17, Goliath the Philistine loses his head. In 2 Kings/4 Reigns 18-19, an Assyrian army becomes a host of corpses overnight. Moreover, Deuteronomy 4 (LXX) and 5 (MT/LXX) grant “the living God” dominion over life and death by portraying God’s provision of life to the Israelites (a life which depends upon killing Canaanites). Joshua 3 does so by suggesting that Canaanite annihilation is a corollary of God’s dwelling among Israel. 1 Samuel/Reigns 17 makes it explicit that it is ultimately Israel’s God who delivers the Israelites from the Philistine military threat by bringing about Goliath’s death (17:47). 2 Kings/4 Reigns 18-19 asserts that YHWH, and not Sennacherib, provides life to Judah.

Finally, in each of these narratives, boundary-construction and/or maintenance are key concerns. Deuteronomy 4 (LXX) and 5 (MT/LXX) separate Israel from other nations by virtue of Israel’s election. Joshua 3 describes a border crossing that defines Israel’s identity as a landed people whose borders (ideally) cannot tolerate the presence of the land’s Canaanite inhabitants. 1 Samuel/Reigns 17 defines Philistines as the ultimate “other” and draws a religious and ethnic boundary around Israelites through the

mutilation of Goliath's (representative) body. 2 Kings/4 Reigns 18-19 marks boundaries between Judah and Assyria by asserting the ultimate authority and victory of Judah's God over Sennacherib, whose representative has threatened Judahite independence.

In sum: in each of these instances, Israel's "living God" is conceived as using dominion over life and death to separate Israel from the nations (and keep them separate) in contexts of identity-formation and boundary-construction/maintenance. The epithet therefore functions as a discursive boundary marker between Israel (along with Israel's God) and gentiles. It is part of a pattern of theological expression which draws fundamental distinctions between "us" and "them." As I have already emphasized, this pattern of particularism co-exists in the biblical corpus with more favorable depictions of the relationship of non-Israelites to Israel and to the God of Israel. This fact strengthens my thesis that a tradition of boundary-formation exists in which God's "living" is associated with gentiles' dying, since the epithet is mobilized in those particular passages which construct unyielding, ethnically-delineated boundaries.

In the next chapter, I investigate this boundary-marking epithet in its appearances in four later Hellenistic Jewish narratives. Scholars have long noted that the title "the living God" appears frequently in Greek-speaking Judaism in contexts of idol polemic. No scholarly treatment, however, pays sustained attention to the representation of gentiles in these narrative contexts. The regularity of the epithet's appearance in conjunction with gentile destruction in the biblical texts surveyed here suggests that such an analysis is warranted. To that task I now turn.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EXECUTING BOUNDARIES: LIFE, DEATH, AND ‘THE LIVING GOD’ IN HELLENISTIC JUDAISM

#### Introduction

In Chapter One, I demonstrated that the epithet “(the) living God” occurs in the narratives of Israel’s scriptures as a boundary-drawing device, marking Israel’s God as distinct from all other gods and separating Israel from all other nations by virtue of the “living” God’s giving life to Israel and to no one else. This chapter investigates the epithet’s appearances in Hellenistic Jewish narratives in order to survey the ways in which later Greek-speaking Jewish authors received, adapted, and re-created this tradition of “living God” terminology.<sup>1</sup> The epithet appears at least once in Greek Esther (OG), 3 Maccabees, and both Greek versions of Daniel (OG and TH, in different contexts).<sup>2</sup> Based on my findings in the previous chapter, where I showed that “living God” terminology occurs in biblical settings of gentile destruction and as part of rhetorical

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<sup>1</sup> My approach to the epithet in Hellenistic Jewish narratives differs from that of Everding and Goodwin in the same way that my procedure in the previous chapter departed from theirs: I treat each text as a narrative whole, making claims about the epithet’s function in each text before drawing synthetic, comparative conclusions. In this chapter, while I draw on the studies of Everding and Goodwin where appropriate, I wait to engage their principal meta-claims about the epithet in Hellenistic Judaism until after I have developed my own arguments.

<sup>2</sup> More details on the date and provenance of these narratives appear below. These are the only extant narratives from Hellenistic Judaism (excluding *Joseph and Aseneth*, as I understand it) which employ the epithet “(the) living God.” Chapter Three treats the epithet in *Joseph and Aseneth*.

agendas that inscribe boundaries of identity, I focus my discussions of the epithet in these four narratives with the following questions in mind: Who lives? Who does not? And what difference does that make for who is “in” and who is “out”? I argue that the epithet continues to erect boundaries in contexts of identity negotiation, but that the dividing line is not strictly ethnic. In other words, in these narratives, some gentiles live.

### **The Living God in Esther OG**

Esther OG is a Jewish work from the second or first century BCE which was likely composed/compiled in Egypt, though it may have been transported there from Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> The epithet appears twice, once in the Greek translation of an existing MT passage where the Hebrew version does not have the epithet, and once in one of the six additions written after the Hebrew narrative was composed. In both instances, the epithet

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<sup>3</sup> The Greek text of Esther exists in two forms, the OG and the A-text. “Living God” terminology occurs only in the former, so it is this version I treat here. On the dating of Esther OG to the Hellenistic period, see Carey A. Moore, *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah: The Additions* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 161. The earliest date to which the Greek version of Esther can be understood to have been written is the date of the final form of the Hebrew version, which Moore indicates is sometime during the early Hellenistic period, though some Hebrew versions date to the late Persian period (*The Additions*, 161). He specifies that either 78 or 114 BCE is a more likely *terminus post quem*, however, if the colophon is to be considered genuine (“In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus...and his son Ptolemy brought the above book of Purim, which they ‘said’ was authentic and had been translated by Lysichamus son of Ptolemy, a member of the Jerusalem community”; Moore’s trans.). Sidnie White Crawford comments that the colophon “raises more questions than it answers” and suggests a date of composition in the late second century BCE on the grounds that the hostility between the gentile and Jewish characters most likely reflects historical antagonism after the Maccabean wars (“The Additions to Esther: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 3 [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1999], 947, 970-71 [quotation from 970]). With respect to the narrative’s provenance, Moore suggests that Additions B and E were composed in Alexandria, while A and F may have been written in Palestine (*The Additions*, 166-67), though this proposal appears to rely upon the old scholarly division of “Diaspora (or Hellenistic) Judaism” from “Palestinian Judaism.” In his discussion of the Additions in *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005; pages 202-205), George Nickelsburg categorizes them under the heading “Israel in Egypt” but does not venture a guess on their date. By contrast, John Collins understands the colophon as evidence that Greek Esther was composed in Jerusalem and later transported to Egypt (*Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* [New York: Crossroad, 1986], 111).

issues from gentile mouths in reference to Israel's God. The speakers recognize this God's power and intervention in the world and also, as in the paradigm established in Israel's scriptures (outlined in Chapter One), associate Israel's "living God" with life and death. Yet, Esther OG contains the first instance of the epithet discussed so far where the "living God" is conceived as blessing, rather than destroying, a gentile. Issues of identity do not thereby fall by the wayside, however, for, as I discuss below, it is important in Esther OG that Jews among gentiles look and behave like Jews.

Esther OG begins with a scene that is distinct from its Hebrew counterpart. Mordecai's opening dream introduces an ethnic conflict: two dragons appear, poised for battle with each other (1:4), one symbolizing "every nation" (πᾶν ἔθνος), who is threatening a nation of righteous people (δικαίων ἔθνος) represented by the second dragon. The whole cosmos is anxious about the ensuing encounter. Verse four pelts the reader with successive nouns, which (in both content and form) portray the universe in roaring chaos:

καὶ ἰδοὺ φωναὶ καὶ θόρυβος βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός ταραχος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς  
And behold: uproar and confusion, thunder and quaking, tumult upon the earth!<sup>4</sup>

Similarly constructed, verse seven piles on further such nouns:

καὶ ἰδοὺ ἡμέρα σκότους καὶ γνόφου θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία κάκωσις καὶ ταραχος  
μέγας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς  
And behold: a day of gloom and darkness, tribulation and anguish, oppression and great tumult upon the earth!

The righteous nation prepares to be destroyed (ἡτοιμάσθησαν ἀπολέσθαι) and cries out to God (ἐβόησαν πρὸς τὸν θεόν; 1:8). The despair is interrupted, though, as the reader

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.



immediately learns that God plans to resolve the conflict in favor of the righteous nation (1:11-12). As Carey Moore comments, it is “small wonder God is invoked in the Greek version” since “the struggle between the Jews and their enemies is on a universal, cosmic level, where *all* men are enemies of the Jews.”<sup>5</sup> The solution (God’s direct involvement) fits the intensity of problem (the threat to destroy God’s people). Any suspense about the success or failure of the oppressing nations’ evil plan against the Jews collapses as the reader learns, along with Mordecai, that God does not intend to let them perish. They will live.

While Mordecai’s dream introduces the main drama of the narrative as a threat to Jewish existence in Persia, this is only one of two interrelated tales of conflict-resolution. There is a sub-plot being simultaneously woven through the story line of God’s rescue of the Jews: the tale of Mordecai versus Haman. The epithet “(the) living God” occurs once in each tale. In the smaller-scaled of the two plots, Haman develops a vendetta against Mordecai because the latter refuses to bow to him, even though the king has ordered everyone to do obeisance to Haman (3:2-6). Haman is angered at Mordecai’s refusal and plans to exact revenge by destroying (*ἀφανίσαι*) all the Jews living under Artaxerxes’ rule. The Jews, he tells the king, are a nuisance because of their special laws and their failure to obey those of the empire (3:8). Artaxerxes easily, almost blithely, acquiesces to Haman’s request (3:10-11) and announces a future date on which the Jews in every

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<sup>5</sup> Moore, *The Additions*, 181. The addition of Moredecai’s dream in the Greek version presents the clash between Israel and the nations as a grand-scale conflict between diametrically-opposed people groups, a characterization which stands in contrast to the more limited conflict between individuals in the MT version. See Crawford, “The Additions to Esther,” 948-49.

province shall be killed (3:12-13 plus addition B, which “records” the text of the king’s edict).

With his plot to destroy Persia’s Jews underway, Haman determines to eliminate one in particular – Mordecai – whose presence in the royal court he finds unpalatable. Unaware that Mordecai and Esther have initiated a plan to undo the ethnic death sentence (4:4-5:9), Haman consults his wife and friends for advice (5:10-13). They suggest a gallows: he should hang Mordecai (5:14). But God intervenes and leads Artaxerxes to discover a reason to do the opposite. Mordecai, the king now realizes, deserves to be honored for earlier foiling an assassination attempt against the ruler (6:1-3). Without revealing the object of his admiration, the king enlists Haman to devise a way to pay appropriate tribute to someone worthy of honor (6:5-6). In a dramatic moment of ironic reversal, Haman, believing himself the beneficiary, inadvertently describes measures for honoring Mordecai; he is then compelled to execute his ideas in esteem of the very man he intended to execute on the gallows (6:7-12).

Having been duly honored, Mordecai appears to be out of harm’s way, but a menacing specter remains in the reader’s imagination: the gallows still waits in the courtyard, a reminder that neither Mordecai nor his fellow Jews are out of danger. The edict for their annihilation is still in effect. When Haman returns to his wife and friends, though, they perceive that it is actually Haman who is in danger. They use the epithet “living God” as they warn him: “If Mordecai is of the Jewish people (γένους Ιουδαίων) and you have begun to be humbled before him, you will certainly fall (πесὼν πεсῃ) and you will not be able to ward him off, for a living God is with him (ὅτι θεὸς ζῶν μετ’

αὐτοῦ)” (6:13).<sup>6</sup> In this appearance of the epithet, Haman’s wife and friends mark Mordecai as a Jew while indicating that it is his “living God” who has orchestrated Haman’s failure. Whereas Haman has attempted to make the Jews’ difference cause for their destruction (cf. 3:8), his friends perceive that the difference Mordecai’s Jewishness makes is that his God has saved his life. It is for this reason that Haman’s friends call Moredecai’s God “living.” They intuit, furthermore, that Haman is doomed as a result. In this instance, the epithet is conceived in terms familiar from Israel’s scriptures: Mordecai’s God (Israel’s God) is a living God who gives life to Mordecai the Jew and will bring destruction on the non-Jew Haman.

As his friends predicted (6:13: *πεςὼν πεςῆ*), Haman indeed falls. Once Esther reveals to the king that she is among those whom he intends to kill, Haman – the plan’s instigator – is hanged on the same gallows he prepared for Mordecai (7:1-10). With Haman himself undone, his plot against the Jews quickly fails as well, as Esther persuades the king to revoke his edict commanding their slaughter (8:3-12). Addition E supplies the text of the king’s second edict sent throughout his kingdom. He uses the epithet “living God” as he exculpates the Jewish people:

But we find that the Jews, who were consigned to annihilation by this thrice-accursed man, are not evildoers, but are governed by most righteous laws and are children of the living God (*υἱοὺς ζῶντος θεοῦ*), most high, most mighty, who has directed the kingdom both for us and for our ancestors in the most excellent order (NRSV).

The fact that it is a gentile king, earlier complicit in a plot to destroy the Jews, who utters the epithet here accentuates the position of the “living God” as giver of life to the Jews,

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<sup>6</sup> The corresponding passage in the MT (6:13) makes no mention of God.

since it is the death edict of this very king from which God has delivered them.

Following the model of “living God” terminology in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, the “living God” gives life to Israel (here, Jews).

Yet the king’s use of the epithet complicates the model I outlined in Chapter One in two ways. First, a gentile ruler uses it in reference to Israel’s God in a positive way. Secondly, that gentile not only himself survives, but he also attributes the success of his kingdom to this God.<sup>7</sup> This second appearance of the phrase “living God” in Greek Esther, then, departs from a strictly binary model which conceives of Israel’s “living God” as the one who gives life to Jews/Israelites and brings death to others. In this instance, the “living God” is conceived to have blessed a non-Jew.<sup>8</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, both occurrences of the epithet “living God” in Esther OG are unique to this version, having no counterpart in the MT. This is not surprising since, as is well known, the God of Israel is not directly mentioned at all in the MT version of Esther’s story. Recognizing this fact, some interpreters of Hebrew Esther have

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<sup>7</sup> Everding categorizes the appearance of the epithet in Esther 8 (along with Dan 6 and 3 Macc 6) under the rubric of God’s vanquishing the enemies of the Jews with “a twist”: he comments that “[a]lthough accompanied by traditional motifs and terminology concerning the victorious God, the novel adjustment is the epithet’s location in affirmations or decrees of Gentile kings” (“The Living God,” 276). He continues, “the epithet is used in a context reflecting an openness to the Gentiles, so that ‘living God’ designates the divine king who is God of both Jews and the Gentiles” (“The Living God,” 276). While I think he is fundamentally correct about the second use of the epithet in Esther, in my judgment he is too hasty to group it together with Daniel and 3 Maccabees. As I demonstrate, the epithet functions differently in each narrative.

<sup>8</sup> The non-Jews who receive blessing from Israel’s God are apparently not those who try to enact the king’s edict by attacking the Jews in their cities – they are all killed (9:1-16).

nevertheless argued that God is present but hidden.<sup>9</sup> If the MT version of Esther depicts God “behind the scenes,” the author of the additions was not content to leave God there. For example, in addition D, God is the one who softens the king’s heart to receive Esther and her request.<sup>10</sup> The OG version of Esther, moreover, refers to God in passages shared with the MT where God is not explicitly mentioned in the Hebrew (in addition to 6:13, discussed above, see 2:20; 4:8; 6:1).<sup>11</sup> God’s presence is not the only reality which Greek Esther makes obvious. This version also combats the hiddenness of Mordecai’s and Esther’s Jewish identity, which Hebrew Esther portrays as “invisible,” since both characters had been able to hide the fact that they are Jews (2:10; 3:4).<sup>12</sup> Addition C, which portrays successive prayers of Mordecai and Esther, depicts these characters’ Jewish piety. This passage furthermore supplies a religious reason for Mordecai’s refusal to bow to Haman, as Mordecai insists that he will do obeisance to no one but God (4:5-7). It also problematizes MT Esther’s apparent nonchalance with the title character’s sharing the bed of an uncircumcised man (4:26).

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<sup>9</sup> See the helpful summary in Kristin de Troyer and Leah Rediger Schulte, “Is God Absent or Present in the Book of Esther? An Old Problem Revisited” in *The Presence and Absence of God: Claremont Graduate School Philosophy of Religion Conference*, ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 35-36.

<sup>10</sup> Moore’s description of this scene attends nicely to the activity of God with respect to Esther’s actions: “Unquestionably, Addition D is the dramatic climax of the Greek Esther...Esther’s appearance before the king was certainly the high point in her own life: she had taken extensive precautions, fasting and praying to God (C 12-30), and then dressing up in her finest (D 1-5). But although Esther had steeled herself for the terrible moment of truth – so much so that her outward appearance gave no hint of her inner fears (vs. 5) – when the terrible moment came and the awesome king glared at her, Esther failed completely: she fainted dead away (vss. 6-7). She was inadequate for the test. But God was not: he changed the king’s mood to gentleness (vs. 8), thereby bringing victory out of her defeat. It was God’s power, not Esther’s courage or charms, that saved the day. God, not Esther, is the hero of Addition D” (Moore, *The Additions*, 219).

<sup>11</sup> Moore, *The Additions*, 158.

<sup>12</sup> On the invisibility of these characters’ Jewish identities in the MT version of Esther, see esp. Elsie R. Stern, “Esther and the Politics of Diaspora,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 100.1 (2010), 40-45.

Given this evidence, Moore is certainly right to claim that what the Greek additions attempt to *add* is an explicit theological framework for the story, making God's involvement obvious and emphasizing the distinctive religious practices of the Jewish characters.<sup>13</sup> As I discussed above, the later author of addition A read Esther and pictured an anxious cosmos, a world turned upside down. Esther OG attempts to turn it right side up again, constructing a world in which God's intervention is palpable (rather than concealed or even absent) and in which Jews in Persia act like faithful Jews. The first instance of "living God" terminology is intimately tied to this project. When Haman's confidantes realize his grave fate, they attribute the turn of events to two realities: (1) the fact that Mordecai is a Jew, and (2) the involvement of Mordecai's God ("for a living God is with him" [6:13]).<sup>14</sup> These statements combat the hiddenness both of Mordecai's Jewish identity and of God's active involvement. The addition of "living God" in the OG thus furthers the construction of a "stabilizing paradigm" where diasporic Jews are distinguished from others by their faithfulness to Israel's God.<sup>15</sup> The epithet here draws boundary lines between Jews and non-Jews by making Jews' behavior and beliefs explicitly religious (i.e., Jewish). The epithet aids in the disambiguation of Jew from "other." It accentuates Jewish difference from gentiles.

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<sup>13</sup> Moore, *The Additions*, 158. Crawford makes a similar point ("The Additions to Esther," 945-46).

<sup>14</sup> While the Hebrew version also has Haman's friends locate the impending reversal in Mordecai's ethnic identity, the rhetorical effect this statement has for a reader of the OG is different: while in the Hebrew version, Haman's friends are apparently just realizing that Mordecai is Jewish, in the OG, Mordecai and Esther have already been marked (for the reader) by additions which reveal their overt Jewish practice (praying in Addition C, refusing to bow to a human for religious reasons in 4:5-7, and being displeased with interethnic sexual congress in 4:26), so Haman's friends' observation confirms what the reader already knows: Mordecai is a faithful Jew.

<sup>15</sup> I adopt (and re-allocate) the language of "stabilizing paradigm" from Stern, who uses it in her claim that Hebrew Esther's historiography lacks one ("Esther," 45).

The second instance of the “living God” epithet develops further the claim that Israel’s God is present in history, but it abandons the binary of living Jews and dead gentiles. The gentile king, who undoes Haman’s offense, survives, attributing his own successes to the “living God” of Israel. The king’s usage of the epithet thus departs from the emphasis on destruction of non-Jews/non-Israelites in the narratives of Israel’s scriptures and in the first occurrence of the epithet in Greek Esther (which accompanies Haman’s death). Artaxerxes mediates the living God’s gift of life to God’s people by reversing the edict calling for their annihilation while simultaneously granting ultimate authority to this God and accepting that he himself governs only at this God’s pleasure.

Yet the king is apparently the only non-Jew who is convinced that the God of the Jews regards him positively. Others experience not confidence but terror. The reader learns in 8:17 that “many of the gentiles (τῶν ἐθνῶν) were circumcised and Judaized (ἰουδαίζον) on account of fear of the Jews.” Persians (and members of other ethnic groups living in Persia) are now afraid of the Jews – and rightly so, since the latter go on to slay eight hundred men in Susa (9:12, 14), to hang the ten sons of Haman (9:13), and to kill fifteen thousand non-Jews throughout Persia (9:16). The Persians’ solution to save themselves from the swords and gallows of the gleeful Jews (chapter nine) is to Judaize. The verb **מְתִיְהָדִים** is a hithpael participle formed from the word **יְהָד** – Jew. (I return in a moment to the Greek translation of this verb.) Timothy Beal translates the Hebrew version of 8:17 this way: “many people of the land *were jewing*.”<sup>16</sup> As Beal quips, the

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<sup>16</sup> Timothy K. Beal, *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation, and Esther* (London: Routledge, 1997), 103.

fearful Persians seem to understand their choice as “to jew or die.”<sup>17</sup> Just as Haman’s confidantes in the OG version recognized that it was the “living God” of the Jew Mordecai who gave Mordecai life and doomed Haman to death, these gentiles who “Judaize” to save themselves recognize that the Jews have received life and so imitate them in an effort to secure life for themselves. Once again, the epithet “living God” occurs in a narrative context where boundary lines are drawn in terms of life and death, with the ethnic conflict now resolved in just the way the opening scene (addition A) promised.

There is an important difference between the MT and OG of 8:17 which merits comment: the Greek translator uses two words to translate מְתִיחִים, a direct translation (ἰουδαῖζον) and an interpretive addition (περιετέμοντο). The Hebrew narrative gives no indication of what “jewing” looks like. Indeed, as Beal articulates, Jewish identity in Hebrew Esther cannot be seen:

Whatever the performance might entail (perhaps one simply begins calling oneself a Jew), Persians everywhere are suddenly ‘jewing’...there appears in Esther to be no particular core to Jewish identity. Rather, the book plays – often with deadly seriousness – on Jewish identity as a matter of appearances, disclosures, and withholdings.<sup>18</sup>

The lack of commentary in the narrative on the meaning of מְתִיחִים fits well with the fact that both Mordecai and Esther had to *reveal* their Jewishness. Despite Haman’s claim that Jews are different (3:8), this was apparently not obvious through their behavior or appearance.

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<sup>17</sup> Beal, *The Book of Hiding*, 103.

<sup>18</sup> Beal, *The Book of Hiding*, 103.



The verb *ιουδαΐζον*, the Greek translation of *מְיַחֲדִים*, is also ambiguous. Shaye Cohen has shown that verbs built on the name of a population group and ending in *-izein*, such as *ιουδαΐζειν*, had a range of meanings, including (1) to lend political support, (2) to adopt customs, and/or (3) to speak a language.<sup>19</sup> The Greek translator of Esther adds another verb – *περιετέμνοντο*– which clarifies (at least in part) what the people acting like Jews were doing: they were getting circumcised.<sup>20</sup> That is, in case there was any ambiguity inherent in the use of *ιουδαΐζω*, the translator makes sure to add that they were circumcising. The addition of this detail does two things which are concerned with boundaries: (1) it demands a physical difference between Jew and non-Jew, insisting that Jewish identity should be observable, and (2) it defines “acting like a Jew” in terms of religious practice, as inscribing the sign of Israel’s covenant upon one’s body.<sup>21</sup> The translator thus accentuates the difference between Jew and “other” while simultaneously circumscribing religious, rather than ethnic, boundaries around Jewish identity. While the narrative’s agenda is to make diasporic Jews obviously distinct from non-Jews, it does so by representing diasporic Jews as faithful to the covenant, as distinct by virtue of their religious practice (rather than by virtue of their genealogy).

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<sup>19</sup> Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 175-97.

<sup>20</sup> Cohen recognizes this possibility in a footnote. He wonders whether “the Greek translators added ‘they were circumcised’ precisely because of the ambiguity of the verb *ioudaizein*” (*The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 182 n. 30).

<sup>21</sup> The ambiguity which Greek Esther combats likely existed in the author’s own life experience. Cohen argues that ancient Jews and gentiles “were corporeally, visually, linguistically, and socially indistinguishable” (*The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 37). He acknowledges that circumcision “was, of course, the one obvious corporeal indication of Jewishness,” but suggests that it would have been impolite to examine a free person’s genitals (page 30). Moreover, circumcision would only have marked *some* Jews (i.e., the male population; page 39). Even then, he writes, “as long as they kept their pants on, [circumcision] certainly did not make [Jewish males] recognizable” (page 67).

In conclusion, Esther OG ensures that its Jewish characters are consigned neither to genocide nor anonymity, obliteration nor oblivion, and the addition of the epithet “living God” advances this project. As in Israel’s scriptures, the first appearance of the epithet in this narrative carries with it affirmation of a Jewish life and animosity toward an adversarial gentile who dies. Yet, while many Persians are killed in this story, it is not *all* gentiles who are subject to destruction. Rather, the narrative allows the gentile ruler who acknowledges the God of Israel as “living” to survive. Finally, the epithet in Greek Esther aids in the construction of a stabilizing paradigm which differentiates Jew from “other” by making Jewish identity evident rather than hidden, while at the same time constructing this identity as behavioral rather than genealogical (a point to which I return at the close of this chapter).

### **The Living God in 3 Maccabees**

A strikingly similar occurrence of the phrase “children of the living God” appears in 3 Maccabees, a narrative composed in Egypt between 217 BCE (the date of the Battle of Raphia depicted in 3 Macc 1:1-5) and 70 CE (as the author is unaware of the fall of the Jerusalem Temple).<sup>22</sup> A formerly dangerous gentile king, in this case Ptolemy Philopator, uses the expression in a pronouncement reversing his earlier instructions to kill the Jews (in this case, all the Jews of Egypt; 6:28). Thematic parallels and verbal

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<sup>22</sup> On the date and provenance, see H. Anderson, “3 Maccabees: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *OTP*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 510-12; and Sara Raup Johnson, *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identity: 3 Maccabees in Its Cultural Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 133-41. Scholars are divided over a more specific date of composition within the range of 217 BCE – 70 CE, with some arguing for the later part of the Ptolemaic period (the first half of the first century BCE) and others favoring a Roman date. For a compelling case in favor of the earlier dating (no later than 100 BCE), see Johnson, *Historical Fictions*, 132-41.

overlaps between 3 Maccabees and Greek Esther have led some scholars to posit a direct literary relationship.<sup>23</sup> In both narratives, Jews are threatened with annihilation, delivered by the miraculous intervention of Israel's God, and, as already mentioned, called "children of the living God" by a gentile king as he rescinds the order to kill them. Yet the epithet functions differently in 3 Maccabees than in Esther OG. In the present narrative, "living God" language advances polemic against the worship of a false god (Dionysus), separating Israel's God from others by virtue of God's position as "living" (cf. Deut 4:33 LXX, discussed in Chapter One). In contrast to Deut 4:33 LXX, however, the accompanying life/death dichotomy in 3 Maccabees serves primarily not to separate Jew from gentile but to distinguish between faithful and apostate Jews. A different construction of "insider" identity thereby emerges – one which is based on religious practice rather than biological filiation.

Third Maccabees narrates the encounters of the Jewish population in both Jerusalem and Egypt with Ptolemy Philopator, who attempts to record all Egyptian Jews in a census and to brand them with the ivy leaf of Dionysus after becoming angry with the Jews of Palestine who denied him entry to the holy of holies. Philopator then attempts to kill the Egyptian Jews by rounding them up in the hippodrome and having them trampled by inebriated elephants. Israel's God intervenes, however, and the king's plans are thwarted. Philopator utters the epithet as part of his command to let the Jews go (6:28).

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<sup>23</sup> See Noah Hacham, "3 Maccabees and Esther: Parallels, Intertextuality, and Diaspora Identity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126.4 (2007), 765-85, and the literature cited therein.

This cursory sketch of the plot of 3 Maccabees might lead one to judge the narrative a somber story full of fear and loathing. Erich Gruen, by contrast, reads the narrative as a parody of the king, and points to many elements of the tale as humorous. For example, he finds it absurd (and therefore comic) that Philopator must abandon his census because his minions have used up all the available writing supplies.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Philopator is himself already marked with the ivy leaf of Dionysus, the very symbol of disgrace he wanted emblazoned on the Jews.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, in an aura of confusion, the monarch repeatedly reverses his decisions.<sup>26</sup> In addition to Gruen's list, I would claim two other details as potentially comic elements. First, the reason Philopator wants to enter the sacred space of the Jerusalem temple is his amazement at the temple's beauty (εὐπρεπείᾳ), almost analogous to a child's attraction to shiny objects (1:9). Secondly, the narrator employs a hyperbolic scene of distress as the Jews of Jerusalem express their grief at Philopator's plans: brides-to-be go streaking as they rush out of their chambers (perhaps partially) naked, "leaving modesty aside (αἰδῶ παραλείπουσαι)" (1:19).

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<sup>24</sup> Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 236.

<sup>25</sup> Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 236.

<sup>26</sup> Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 236.

Gruen suggests that the rhetorical effect of the levity in 3 Maccabees is “[c]omic relief” which “subverted the aura of foreboding and fear.”<sup>27</sup> He goes on to claim that “[b]y deriding the mental powers of Ptolemy, III Maccabees rendered him less malevolent and less menacing.”<sup>28</sup> The function of the comic elements is not merely to lampoon the king, however; it is to mock his loyalty to an idol, a false god. Indeed, scholars have noted that the monarch is a pawn in the narrative’s parody of the Dionysian cult. Noah Hacham, for example, has shown that 3 Maccabees likely functioned as polemic against Dionysus and against the possibility of Egyptian Jewish participation in the Dionysian cult.<sup>29</sup> He points to the motifs of sleep and forgetfulness – the effects of Dionysian drunkenness – as significant elements of ridicule:

Euripides (*Bacchae*, 282-283, 385) praises the wine drinking in the Dionysian cult, which begets sleep and forgetfulness of the day’s evils. Sleep and forgetfulness are, therefore, good things emanating from Dionysus. But in this story, the king loses his self-control: he oversleeps (5:11-12) and he forgets what happened (5:18-20) and what he ordered (5:26-32).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 236. These comic elements (even those that poke fun at the gentile ruler) should not be viewed as representing a negative attitude towards gentiles in general. Johnson has commented that “the text aims not to promote hostility between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors but to assist pious Jews strongly invested in Greek culture to steer a middle ground between the evils of separatism and the perils of assimilation” (*Historical Fictions*, 174).

<sup>28</sup> Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 236.

<sup>29</sup> Noah Hacham, “3 Maccabees: An Anti-Dionysian Polemic,” in *Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christian and Jewish Narrative*, eds. Jo-Ann A. Brant, Charles W. Hedrick, and Chris Shea (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 167-83; see also J.R.C. Cousland, “Dionysus Theomachos? Echoes of the *Bacchae* in 3 Maccabees,” *Biblica* 82.4 (2001), 539-48; Clayton N. Croy, “Disrespecting Dionysus: 3 Maccabees as Narrative Satire of the God of Wine,” in *Scripture and Traditions: Essays on Early Judaism and Christianity in Honor of Carl R. Holladay*, eds. Patrick Gray and Gail R. O’Day (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 3-19.

<sup>30</sup> Hacham, “3 Maccabees: An Anti-Dionysian Polemic,” 176.

The supposed benefits of Dionysian cult participation, then, become problems for Philopator in his plan to annihilate the Jews who refuse to receive the ivy leaf brand. They are part of the undoing of the monarch's aims as "a covert weapon in God's defeat of Dionysus."<sup>31</sup> And it is indeed a victory for the God of the Jews, who through angelic mediation saves his worshipers from their impending death and turns the instruments of execution – the drunken pachyderms – against the king's soldiers (6:18-21).

It is this show of force against the aggressors which causes Philopator's anger against the Jews to become "pity and tears" (6:22). He shifts the blame for the evil plan to his friends and commands that the Jews be released (6:24-27). As already indicated, Philopator uses the epithet in this proclamation: "Set free the [children] of the Almighty, heavenly, living god (τοὺς υἱοὺς τοῦ παντοκράτορος ἐπουρανίου θεοῦ ζῶντος), who from our parents' time until now has been providing uninterrupted and illustrious stability to our affairs" (6:28 *NETS*). The appearance of the "living God" epithet here carries with it the connotation of gentile-destruction which we have already encountered in its occurrences in Israel's scriptures. Philopator uses the epithet to describe the Jews' God just after this deity has caused the rampaging elephants to turn upon their (non-Jewish) handlers. Even the king realizes the threat of the "living God": he releases his Jewish captives because he is *afraid* of their God, whom he calls "living" as he expresses his trepidation.

We might not wonder at Philopator's fear; the narrator describes the scene of God's intervention in harrowing terms:

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<sup>31</sup> Hacham, "3 Maccabees: An Anti-Dionysian Polemic," 176.

Then the most glorious, Almighty and true God showed forth his holy face and opened the heavenly gates from which descended two glorious angels, terrible to behold, who were apparent to all except the Judeans, and they withstood the force of the opponents and filled them with confusion and dread and bound them fast with shackles. And even the body of the king was ashudder (ὑπόφρικον)... (6:18-20 *NETS*).<sup>32</sup>

Even Gruen, who sees levity throughout 3 Maccabees, recognizes that the king understands the “living God” as no joke: “At the conclusion of his letter to his generals, [Philopator] acknowledges that it was not his good nature or altruism that prompted the release of the Jews, but sheer terror.”<sup>33</sup> The monarch sets them free because he feels a very real threat from the Jews’ God, whom he labels “living” immediately after witnessing the destruction of his troops by this deity’s “terrible angels” (φοβεροιδεῖς ἄγγελοι; 6:18).

As in Israel’s scriptures, furthermore, God is termed “living” in a narrative context in which God grants life to the chosen people, in this case by saving them from Philopator’s plan of destruction. Yet, the epithet (in conjunction with the theme of a choice between life and death) is *not* associated with strict ethnic boundaries in this narrative. As in Greek Esther, it is a gentile king who utters the epithet and himself survives. More importantly, though, there are (ethnic) *Jews* who are killed in 3 Maccabees – those who have chosen to submit to the census and to be marked by the ivy leaf of Dionysus. Unlike Artaxerxes’ edict in Greek Esther, which had required the extermination of all Jews, Philopator’s rounding up of Jews condemned to death does not

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<sup>32</sup> The shackling motif may also participate in the polemic against Dionysus. See Hacham, “3 Maccabees: An Anti-Dionysian Polemic,” 177-78.

<sup>33</sup> Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 235.

include those who have apostatized in order to save themselves. Indeed, Philopator's decree had given them an option: "If any of [the Jews] should prefer to adopt the practices of those who have been initiated according to the rites, they will enjoy equal civic rights with the Alexandrians" (2:30).

The apostate Jews' exemption from Philopator's punishment turns out to exempt them also from the divinely-catalyzed life enjoyed by those Jews who "did not separate from their religion" (2:32). In the end, the Jews who had remained faithful are granted permission to kill those who apostatized to the cult of Dionysus (7:10-15).<sup>34</sup> The narrator reports that, amidst mirth and merriment (μετὰ χαρᾶς, 7:13; εὐφροσύνην μετὰ χαρᾶς, 7:15), they "set about punishing every defiled fellow national (τῶν μεμιαμμένων ὁμοεθνῆ) who fell in their path and slaying them as an example to all" (7:14-15). More than three hundred meet their end (7:15). As Sara Raup Johnson comments, "The message is clear, not to say chilling, for any Jew who had ever considered lapsing for any reason whatsoever."<sup>35</sup> Even if 3 Maccabees contains comic elements, then, there is also a serious issue at stake, one of life and death: whether one worships "the living God" (the God of the Jews) or participates in the cult of Dionysus.

It is important to note that the boundary here associated with life, death, and the "living God" is not drawn down ethnic lines. It is not the case in 3 Maccabees that Jews receive life from Israel's "living God" regardless of their covenantal (dis)obedience.

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<sup>34</sup> I focus attention principally on the Jewish characters' relationship to the Jewish God, but 3 Maccabees can also be read as commentary on the proper Jewish relationship to empire. Johnson has shown that this narrative insists on loyalty to empire when such a stance does not lead to infidelity to the Jewish Law (*Historical Fictions*, 151-57).

<sup>35</sup> Johnson, *Historical Fictions*, 176.



Proper Jewish identity is instead defined in terms of religious practice. The rhetorical agenda of 3 Maccabees in its historical setting may be determinative for drawing the boundary line here. I discussed above the anti-Dionysian polemic in the narrative: the author of 3 Maccabees ridiculed both gentile and Jewish participation in the cult of Dionysus, likely to dissuade any Jews who were so inclined. Sara Raup Johnson argues that the narrative's "preoccupation with the specter of apostasy" is telling for understanding its discursive agenda, which is to insist that Jews must be faithful to Jewish tradition.<sup>36</sup> It is possible, though, that the author had an additional interest. David S. Williams has argued that 3 Maccabees is concerned to draw parallels between Jews living in Palestine and Jews living in Egypt (and God's positive response to both) in order to mount a defense of diaspora Judaism.<sup>37</sup> Williams points out that the narrative connects Palestinian and Egyptian Judaism by showing (1) Philopator's attempts to punish Jews in Palestine and in Egypt for the offenses of the other group (2:27-28; 3:1; 5:43), and (2) God's providential care for Jews in both Palestine and in Egypt (2:21-27; 5:11-12; 6:16-19).<sup>38</sup> If Williams is right, then the religious boundary between covenant-

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<sup>36</sup> Johnson, *Historical Fictions*, 176-81. Johnson also points out, furthermore, that for 3 Maccabees, Jewish fidelity to the Law does not require wholesale separatism from Hellenistic culture (given the high rhetorical style of the composition and the author's interest in court life) or from the state (since the faithful Jews argue that the apostate Jews' disobedience to God means they might also be disobedient to the king [7:11-12]).

<sup>37</sup> David S. Williams, "3 Maccabees: A Defense of Diaspora Judaism?," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 13 (1995), 17-29.

<sup>38</sup> Williams, "3 Maccabees: A Defense," 24-25. For a more recent affirmation of this view, see Noah Hacham, "Sanctity and Attitude towards the Temple in Hellenistic Judaism," in *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History?: On Jews and Judaism Before and After the Destruction of the Second Temple*, eds. Daniel R. Schwartz and Zeev Weiss in collaboration with Ruth A. Clements (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 155-80, esp. 178-79.

keeping Jew and covenant-trespassing Jew is intended to demonstrate that most Jews living in Egypt are faithful, even to the point of killing defectors (cf. Deut 13:6-18).

In 3 Maccabees, the epithet “living God” continues to be associated both with boundary-drawing and with the dichotomy between life and death. There is a sharp divide between Israel’s God and Dionysus, just as there is a sharp divide between the Jews whose lives God saves and the non-Jews who meet destruction because of God’s intervention. But, as I have noted, two narrative details complicate the location of other boundary lines. First, the gentile king who is (rightly) afraid of the “living God” survives the encounter and then becomes the divine catalyst for gentile friendliness to Jews. (He does, after all, throw them a party [7:18]). Secondly, and more significantly, while the narrative draws parallels between Palestinian and diasporic Jews, it erects a boundary between faithful and apostate Jews. The dividing line is religious rather than ethnic; the issue at stake is fundamentally about whom one worships rather than from which family one descends. The proper object of worship is also a theological issue in both Greek versions of the book of Daniel, to which I now turn.

### **The Living God in Daniel OG**

The book of Daniel exists in two Greek versions, the Old Greek (OG), which most scholars consider to be the earlier (late second or early first century BCE), and

Theodotion's translation (TH), which corresponds more readily to the MT.<sup>39</sup> The epithet occurs once in the MT version of Daniel, which TH reproduces in Greek. I return below to this usage along with the other appearances of the epithet in TH which have no counterpart in the MT. This section treats the three occurrences of the title "(the) living God" in Daniel OG, all of which are unique to this version of Daniel.

The epithet occurs in Daniel OG in three different episodes of the title character's adventures in the court of successive gentile kings: Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4, Baltasar in chapter 5, and Darius in chapter 6.<sup>40</sup> These narrative units occur in varying orders in the two extant Greek manuscripts of Daniel OG: in contrast to ninth- to eleventh-century Codex Chisianus (ms. 88), whose chapter order corresponds to the MT,

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<sup>39</sup> On the Greek texts of Daniel, see Collins, John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 3-11; Johan Lust, "The Septuagint Version of Daniel 4-5," in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings*, ed. A.S. van der Woude (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 39-53; Tim McLay, *The OG and Th Versions of Daniel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), esp. 12-16. The Old Greek version originated in Egypt, and although the dating is unknown, scholars typically assign it to the late second or early first century BCE based in large part on the fact that 1 Maccabees seems to know it (see 1 Macc 1:9 [cf. Dan 12:4 OG]; 1:18 [cf. Dan 11:26 OG]; 4:41, 43 [cf. Dan 8:14 OG]; and 1:54 [cf. Dan 8:14 OG]). On this, see Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. DiLella, *The Book of Daniel* (AB 23; Garden City: Doubleday, 1978), 78; and Collins, *Daniel*, 8-9. Scholars are even less confident about the date of Daniel TH, which had completely supplanted the OG in the Christian church by the late fourth century CE. Marti J. Steussy provides a helpful history of scholarship on the question of its date (*Gardens in Babylon: Narrative and Faith in the Greek Legends of Daniel* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993], 32-37). It is likely that Daniel TH (in some form) predates the NT documents which appear to quote from it (e.g., Heb 11:33, which corresponds to Dan 6:22 TH; see Alexander A. DiLella, "The Textual History of Septuagint-Daniel and Theodotion-Daniel," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 2, eds. John J. Collins, Peter W. Flint [Leiden, Brill: 2001], 593-94). As Steussy indicates, the combined evidence for the geographical provenance does not allow for greater specificity than "a locale with a significant Jewish presence, where both Greek and Aramaic figure as important languages, with a history of Seleucid government and close to the eastern or southern edges of Asia Minor" (*Gardens in Babylon*, 36). She posits Ephesus and Antioch as possible options (*Gardens in Babylon*, 36-37).

<sup>40</sup> These narrative units correspond broadly to stories also told in Daniel MT/TH, but there are many differences between them, as T. J. Meadowcroft has shown (*Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel: A Literary Comparison* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 31-56 [on Dan 3], 57-84 [on Dan 4], and 85-121 [on Dan 6]).

papyrus 967 (mid-second century CE) has chapters 5 and 6 after chapters 7 and 8.<sup>41</sup> I treat the epithet's appearance within each distinct narrative unit and compare them to one another in order to draw synthetic conclusions about the meaning and function of "(the) living God" in Daniel OG. I contend that the epithet has three functions within these narratives: (1) to defy any geographical circumscribing of Israel's God to Jerusalem, (2) to illustrate that Israel's God – and not any gentile ruler – is ultimately in charge, and (3) to show that Israel's God – and not any god of the gentiles – is able to give life.

The epithet first appears in the chapter 4 story of Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. In Dan 4:2-9 OG, the king has a dream of a glorious tree which provides shelter and fruit for all of earth's living creatures and whose "crown came close to heaven."<sup>42</sup> The vision turns ominous when an angel descends from heaven and commands that the tree be cut down and destroyed (4:1-11). Yet, says the angel, a root should be spared so that the tree may eventually recognize God's ultimate dominion: it will "graze with [the animals] until [it] acknowledges that the Lord of heaven has authority over everything which is in heaven and which is on the earth" (4:12-13). The king then sees the tree felled, dismembered, and taken to prison in shackles (4:14). Seeking an explanation of his dream, Nebuchadnezzar calls on Daniel, who has already secured a reputation for interpreting dreams (4:15).

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<sup>41</sup> The notion that each of these stories can be read as self-contained narrative episodes is confirmed by the manuscript evidence, since chapter 4 could appear separately from chapters 5-6 (though these chapters do occur in the same chronological order in both manuscripts). The only other extant manuscript witness to the OG version of the text is a Syriac translation of Origen's Hexapla (Steussy, *Gardens in Babylon*, 28).

<sup>42</sup> Translations of Daniel OG are from R. Timothy McLay, "Daniel," in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, eds. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 991-1022. For a diachronic disentangling of chapter 4, see Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of a Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends* (Fortress Press, 1990), 87-121.

Amazed and afraid (4:16), Daniel reveals that Nebuchadnezzar's vision is not good news for the dreamer: the great tree is the (prideful and power-seeking) king himself (4:17-19). The king's most egregious offense is his earlier ravaging of the Temple of Israel's God: "Your works were seen, how you made desolate the house of the living God (τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος) on account of the sins of the sanctified people" (4:19). This example of the king's behavior does not appear in the MT version of Daniel's dream interpretation, and, as T. J. Meadowcroft points out, its inclusion here in the OG version yields a "more adversarial" stance toward the king than the MT displays.<sup>43</sup> As Daniel continues (in the OG), the message becomes more menacing:

And the vision, which you saw, that an angel was sent in power by the Lord and that he said to destroy and cut down the tree: the verdict of the great God will come upon you, and the Most High and his angels are pursuing you. They will take you away to prison and send you away into a desert place" (4:20-22).<sup>44</sup>

The epithet appears here in a context of threat to a gentile who has made himself an adversary of "the living God" by profaning this God's Temple.

The epithet, furthermore, marks the Jerusalem Temple as the territory of "the living God," who plans to punish the gentile ruler (even though it was God who delivered Jerusalem and the temple vessels to the king [cf. 1:1-2]). It is clear, furthermore, as

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<sup>43</sup> Meadowcroft, *Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel*, 55.

<sup>44</sup> Collins observes that the OG version of this passage is "more condemnatory in tone" than its counterpart in MT/TH since the OG has the "plus" of the king's pursuit by God and his angels (*Daniel*, 229).

Goodwin indicates, that this God’s authority extends beyond Jerusalem.<sup>45</sup> God is the one who is ultimately in power because God is the one who gives Nebuchadnezzar the authority to rule and is likewise the one who can take it away. The next appearance of “life” language in the narrative drives home the point: κύριος ζῇ ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ γῇ (“The Lord lives in heaven, and his authority is over the whole earth”; 4:23). The “living God” has a Temple in Jerusalem but “lives” in heaven and so has dominion everywhere.

Hope is not lost for Nebuchadnezzar, however, as Daniel insists that the king may call upon this God and atone for his sins so that “[he] might be long-lived on the throne of [his] kingdom and not be destroyed” (καὶ πολυήμερος γένη ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς βασιλείας σου καὶ μὴ καταφθίρῃ σε; 4:24). The logic here is that the king has offended the “living God” by failing to recognize God’s ultimate authority and, furthermore, that this God is the one who chooses to invest the king with power or to depose him, a dichotomy couched in terms of having “many days” (πολυήμερος) versus meeting destruction. In this episode, then, “the living God” wields life and death as a metaphor for investing or withdrawing imperial power.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Goodwin writes, “Even with his temple in ruins, the living God still exercises universal sovereignty over Gentile kings, exercising divine power to depose those kings who profaned his house and worshiped idols” (*Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 73). I do not agree, however, that idolatry is a central concern in this particular episode, though it becomes a significant enemy in the stories of chapters 5 and 6 (see below). Goodwin’s (inaccurate) pointing to idolatry at this point is the result of his reading other instances of the epithet which *do* polemicize idolatry (e.g., Dan OG 5:23-24; 6:25-27; Bel and the Dragon 5; and even *Jos. Asen.* 8.5) into this one rather than interpreting 4:19 on its own terms.

<sup>46</sup> The verb ζάω does not appear in the development of this metaphor, but the adjective πολυήμερος in all its other instances in Israel’s scriptures connotes living a long time versus dying prematurely (Deut 22:7; 25:15; 30:18).

The details of Nebuchadnezzar's vision come to fruition in the subsequent narrative as the God of Israel takes away his kingdom and then restores it to him (4:25-33).<sup>47</sup> The king finally acknowledges God's sovereign power (4:34) and tells his subjects to do likewise (4:35). In the course of this recognition and command, Nebuchadnezzar claims that the God of Israel compares to no other god: "the gods of the nations do not have power in them to give away the kingdom of a king to another king and to kill and to make alive..." (4:34). The narrative insists that only Israel's God – who is named "the living God" in the throes of a threat against a gentile ruler – has dominion over imperial authority and has the ability to control life and death.<sup>48</sup> Yet Nebuchadnezzar neither dies nor ultimately loses his position because he finally acknowledges the ultimate power of the God of Israel.

Whereas the usage of the epithet in Daniel 4 pivots on the issue of whether Israel's God (as "the living God") or Nebuchadnezzar is, in the end, the ultimate authority, another appearance of the epithet pits "the living God" against a gentile king and against his gods. In Daniel 5 (OG), the reader is introduced to Nebuchadnezzar's son, Baltasar, who has succeeded his father on the throne. Amidst a festive scene of eating and drinking, Baltasar sends for the Jerusalem Temple vessels Nebuchadnezzar had brought to Babylon (5:1-2). Once in the hands of the king and his guests, the narrator reveals, the vessels are appropriated as instruments of inebriation and idolatry:

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<sup>47</sup> Only in OG is Nebuchadnezzar required to make supplication before being restored (Collins, *Daniel*, 231).

<sup>48</sup> Much has been written on the negative stance toward empire taken in the MT version of the book of Daniel. See in particular Anthea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), esp. 223-79, and the literature cited therein.

“And [the vessels] were brought, and they were drinking with them. And they blessed their handmade idols, and they did not bless the eternal God who had authority over their spirit” (τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτῶν; 5:4). Their folly is highlighted by the use of the polemical word εἰδωλα (rather than the more neutral “gods” as in the MT [אלהים] and TH [τοὺς θεούς]).<sup>49</sup>

Since the Temple vessels are associated with “the living God” (4:22), who bestows power/life and deposes/destroys, the ensuing dramatic divine intervention is not surprising. In this famous scene, fingers suddenly appear and write on the wall, introducing an atmosphere of foreboding (5:5-6). Baltasar demands an interpretation of the writing, but no one is able to provide one – except for Daniel (5:7-8, 17). The Judean first translates for the king (“it has been numbered; it has been reckoned; it has been taken away” [5:17]) and then explains why Baltasar’s kingdom will be “cut short” (5:27):

O King, you made a feast for your Friends, and you were drinking wine, and the vessels of the house of the living God were brought to you, and you were drinking with them, you and your nobles. And you praised all the idols made by human hands, and you did not bless the living God (τῷ θεῷ τῷ ζῶντι). And your spirit (τὸ πνεῦμά σου) is in his hand, and he himself gave to you your reign, and you did not bless him nor praise him (5:23-24).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Meadowcroft points to the OG’s use of εἰδωλα as evidence that its version of the story has a “monotheistic emphasis” when viewed against the MT (*Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel*, 80). His astute attention to word choice momentarily lapses, however, when he states that “the two versions agree substantially in their description of the living God whom the king has failed to acknowledge and whose sacred vessels he has desecrated” (page 80). Only in the OG version of this episode is God described as “living.”

<sup>50</sup> Goodwin claims that “the living God” is here presented as “the source of life for all people” (*Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 74). While Daniel mentions that God is sovereign over the king’s spirit, the main point is God’s identity as sovereign *ruler* over gentile kings even outside of Jerusalem – not God’s identity as *creator*. Furthermore, Daniel says nothing of other human beings here.



As in chapter 4, the epithet appears in a passage accusing the reigning king of failure to recognize that it is “the living God” who allows him to reign. Baltasar goes beyond his father’s offense, however, as he employs the earthly, physical symbols of this God in service of other, false gods; he praises “handmade” idols instead of “the living God.”<sup>51</sup> Like his father, Baltasar loses his kingdom after offending this God. Unlike Nebuchadezzar, though, he does not repent and is not reinstated.

Darius, who utters the epithet in chapter six, is different. In the end, he willingly subjects himself to Daniel’s God, whom he calls a “living God” after witnessing this God save Daniel’s life. The story begins with a conflict, however. Darius has chosen Daniel to serve as one of three men with authority over his satraps (6:1-3), and the other two appointees desire to be rid of Daniel and so devise a plan against him. Having noticed that Daniel prays to his God three times daily, the two men advise Darius to issue an interdict requiring anyone who prays to someone other than the king during the next thirty days to be fed to lions (6:6-8). Unaware that the interdict targets Daniel, Darius complies (6:9). A small but significant difference between the MT/TH and OG versions at this point illustrates that the issue at stake in the present narrative is whether or not Darius is divine: while the king’s decree in the MT (followed by TH) outlaws prayer to “any god or man” (בַּל-אֱלֹהִים וְאָדָם / παντὸς θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπου) other than himself, the decree in the OG version disallows prayer to any “god” (παντὸς θεοῦ) other than the king

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Deut 4:28; 2 Kgs 19:18; 2 Chron 32:19; Isa 37:19; Psa 115:2-7.

(6:13).<sup>52</sup> Daniel, who will only recognize the deity of his God, blatantly defies the order, opening his windows so that anyone might observe (6:10).

The conspirators observe Daniel's non-compliance (6:11) and accuse him before Darius, who responds with grief at Daniel's impending fate (6:12-14). Unable to himself save Daniel from the lions' den, the king asserts that Daniel's God will rescue him from the lions themselves (6:16). As Daniel is thrown into the lions' pit, the reader learns that God will indeed do so (6:18). The next morning, Darius goes to find out what has happened to Daniel: "O Daniel, are you still alive, and has your God whom you continually serve saved you from the lions, and have they not injured you?" (6:19-20). The issue is whether Daniel's God has been able to keep Daniel alive (ܕܢܝܢܐ). The MT version of Daniel, followed by TH, contains the epithet in 6:20, where Darius calls Daniel a "servant of the living God" as he asks whether the Judean has survived. While the OG version does not employ the epithet here, it is clear that the question of whether Daniel's God has saved his life is indeed important. Daniel answers that he is indeed still living (ܕܢܝܢܐ ܐܝܢ ܗܝܬ ܕܢܝܢܐ); his God has intervened (6:21-22 OG). Having been denied Daniel for dinner, the lions are given the two conspirators and their families instead, and these meet a violent end: "And the lions killed them and shattered their bones" (6:24).

The OG version puts the epithet on Darius's lips only *after* the king has recognized God's ability to keep Daniel alive. After executing the conspirators who targeted Daniel, Darius promotes the latter and calls for the whole kingdom to revere Daniel's God:

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<sup>52</sup> Meadowcroft, *Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel*, 106.

Let all people who are in my kingdom do obeisance and worship Daniel's God, for he is an enduring and living God (θεὸς μένων καὶ ζῶν) for generations and generations, forever. I, Darius, will do obeisance and be subject to him all my days, for the handmade idols are not able to save as God redeemed Daniel (Dan 6:25-27).

Darius calls the God of Israel a “living God,” whom the king contrasts with human-manufactured idols on the basis that this “living God” has saved Daniel by miraculously keeping him alive. The king not only acknowledges the superiority of Daniel's God, but he also worships this “living God” and calls his kingdom to do so as well.<sup>53</sup> The narrative thus imagines the possibility of a gentile ruler's choosing to revere Israel's “living God” upon recognizing that this God gives life.<sup>54</sup>

In the epithet's three appearances in chapters 4-6 of Daniel OG, it functions to separate Israel's God from other gods by virtue of the fact that the “living God” has power over gentile rulers and empires, power over geography, and power over all other gods. In chapter 6, moreover, the epithet advances the theological agenda of affirming that only God, and no human, is divine. While the epithet appears in contexts adversarial to gentiles in chapters four and five, it is not accompanied by their deaths. Daniel 6 OG contains the most gentile-friendly appearance of the epithet discussed so far. The narrative imagines the king recognizing God's ability to give life to Daniel and then worshipping “the living God” as a result. The notion that Israel's God is “living” in contrast to other gods, who do not live, is likewise fundamental to Theodotion's version

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<sup>53</sup> Meadowcroft is right to observe that the king's *personal* commitment to Daniel's God, which is unique to the OG version, fits well with this narrative's concern to show that the king is not divine (*Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel*, 107).

<sup>54</sup> I agree with Cohen's assessment of Darius here as a “reverent gentile” who acknowledges the power of Daniel's God but who does not convert to Judaism (*The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 142).

of Daniel. This theme is developed in Daniel TH in a different part of the story, however. I now turn to the epithet's function in Theodotion's version of Bel and the Dragon.

### **The Living God in Daniel TH**

I mentioned above that Theodotion's version of Daniel takes over the epithet from the MT in 6:20, where Darius calls the Judean hero "servant of the living God." The epithet figures much more prominently in Daniel TH in a section of the narrative with no counterpart in the MT: the Greek legend of Bel and the Dragon. This story is commonly regarded as the supreme example of narrativized Jewish idol polemic in the Second Temple period. Following in the tradition of biblical idol parodies which portray idols as inanimate and impotent (e.g. Jer 10:1-16), this tale seeks to disparage the worship of idols, to mock the reverence of any god but Daniel's God, the God of Israel.<sup>55</sup> While the story of Bel and the Dragon also appears in the OG version of Daniel, "living God" terminology occurs only in Daniel TH, and so it is the latter which I treat here.<sup>56</sup> I mention the OG only when doing so illumines my argument about the epithet in Theodotion's version.

As Marti Steussy has observed, Bel and the Dragon frequently employs "[c]haracterizing epithets" to provide "identifying data" about its characters' various

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<sup>55</sup> For studies of idol parodies in the Hebrew Bible, see Wolfgang Roth, "'For Life, He Appeals to Death' (Wis 13:18): A Study of Old Testament Idol Parodies," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (1975), 21-47; and Michael B. Dick, "Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image," in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael B. Dick (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 16-30.

<sup>56</sup> In her study of the differences between Bel and the Dragon OG and TH (along with both versions of the Susanna legend), Steussy does not recognize the distinctive role the epithet "(the) living God" plays in the theological agenda of Theodotion's version (*Gardens in Babylon*, 55-99). I develop this argument below.

objects of worship.<sup>57</sup> She comments that these “explicit characterizations reinforce the story’s focus on the question ‘whom shall one worship?’.”<sup>58</sup> The issue of whether Bel, the dragon, or Daniel’s God should be venerated is indeed central. Yet, I contend, a closer examination of the epithet “the living God” in TH allows for a more precise formulation of the fundamental issue at stake in this version of the story. In what follows, I argue that Bel and the Dragon TH revolves around the question of whose god is “living,” which is conceived as the principal criterion for deserving worship.

The epithet “(the) living God” appears four times in Bel and the Dragon TH. At its first usage, Daniel proclaims that his God is “the living God” (5). At its second and third occurrences, the king claims that Bel and the dragon are each a “living god” (6, 24). At its final occurrence, Daniel once again asserts that it is his God who is “living” (25). The four usages of the epithet thus appear in a verbal tug-of-war between Daniel and King Cyrus, who each employ the descriptor twice to refer to their respective objects of reverence. The narrative (predictably) resolves the tug-of-war in Daniel’s favor, demonstrating on a quite literal level that neither Bel nor the dragon lives.

The first four verses of the story set up both a friendship and a distinction between the Judean protagonist and the gentile king. The narrative introduces Daniel as a companion of King Cyrus (συμβιωτῆς τοῦ βασιλέως) who is “honored above all of [the king’s] friends” (2). The remark about their companionship (literally, their “living together” [συμβιωτής]) makes the subsequent divergence more stark: despite their

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<sup>57</sup> Steussy, *Gardens in Babylon*, 82-83. Steussy’s Table 5 on page 82 is a succinct visual comparison of such descriptive phrases as they occur in both the OG and TH versions.

<sup>58</sup> Steussy, *Gardens in Babylon*, 83.

friendship, their religious practices divide them. Verse three introduces a god whom Cyrus reveres: Bel, the god of the Babylonians, who is labeled εἰδωλον – a disparaging term which promotes the narrative’s polemical agenda (3). Verse four makes the contrast between Daniel and the king explicit: “And the king revered [Bel] and went throughout each day to worship (προσκυνεῖν) him. But Daniel worshiped (προσεκύνει) his god.” The double use of the verb προσκυνεῖν demonstrates the thrust of the divide: while the king worships Bel, Daniel worships his own god (τῷ θεῷ αὐτοῦ). Even though these characters are friendly with each other, they are separated by the god(s) whom they worship, both in principle and on a literal, physical level (since the king *goes* to worship Bel every day).

The first verbal exchange between king and companion spells out the reason for this distinction. In the OG version, Daniel responds to the king’s query about his failure to revere Bel by claiming that his God is the universal creator (“I worship no one but the Lord, the God who created heaven and earth” [κύριον τὸν θεὸν τὸν κτίσαντα τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν]). The king then asks of Daniel with respect to Bel “Is this one, then, not a god?” (οὗτος οὖν οὐκ ἔστι θεός; 6). This exchange between Daniel and the king is a disagreement about whose object of reverence is actually a god. In Theodotion’s version, by contrast, Daniel uses the epithet “the living God” as he answers the king’s question about why he does not worship Bel: “Because I do not revere idols made by hand (χειροποίητα) but the living God (τὸν ζῶντα θεόν) who created heaven and earth and has dominion over all flesh” (5). The epithet here draws a boundary between Daniel’s God and the Babylonian god Bel: Daniel uses it to insist that whereas idols are human

creations (“made by hand”), his God created all. God’s creative capacity thus informs Daniel’s understanding of his God as “living.”<sup>59</sup> The king responds to Daniel’s contrast of “idol” versus “the living God” by accepting the terms Daniel has set while simultaneously arguing that Bel should qualify as living. He asks, “Do you not think Bel is a living God (ζῶν θεός)?,” and he offers as evidence the food and drink which Bel consumes daily (6).<sup>60</sup> In Theodotion’s version, then, the question of whose god is a *living* god is the crux of the quarrel between Daniel and the king.

A life-and-death contest ensues as Daniel laughs at the king’s notion that Bel is living because of his (Bel’s) ability to eat and drink (7).<sup>61</sup> The king threatens the priests of Bel with death if they cannot prove that Bel is the one eating the food put before him each day; Daniel will die if they succeed (8). Their very lives are dependent upon

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<sup>59</sup> Goodwin puts the point this way: “The antithesis [in verses 5-6] places the humanly created idol in contrast with the God who created the world and rules over all humanity” (*Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 78).

<sup>60</sup> Everding observes that “the term ζῶν becomes the object of the discussion” (“The Living God,” 241). He comments that “whereas in no text of early Judaism (or before) does the epithet occasion a commentary on the term ζῶν there is an obvious play on the term ζῶν in the course of the idol polemic in *Bel and the Dragon*” (“The Living God,” 277). While I agree with his assessment of *Bel and the Dragon* on this point, I have shown that the connection between the epithet and the meaning of “life” is much more widespread in Israel’s tradition.

<sup>61</sup> Claudia Bergmann has demonstrated that consumption of food as it relates to living and dying is a key theme in *Bel and the Dragon* (“The Ability/Inability to Eat: Determining Life and Death in *Bel et Draco*,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 35.3 [2004]: 262-83). She points out that every character in the story relates in some way to the motif of eating food in connection to life/death in order to create a hierarchy. Bel cannot eat, and the dragon cannot discern a time when eating is dangerous. Both of these circumstances lead to these characters’ demise. The priests of Bel, along with their families, eat the food put before the idol and are killed. Daniel eats the food prepared by Habakkuk and lives. The lions’ inability to eat saves Daniel’s life. Their ability to eat guarantees the death of Daniel’s enemies.

whether their god is “living” or not.<sup>62</sup> Both Daniel and the seventy priests of Bel accept the terms of the contest (10-11). In the next verse, the narrator reveals to the reader the means by which the priests have been deceiving the king: they have a secret door which they use to access – and themselves consume – Bel’s provisions (12). The reader now knows with certainty that Bel is not the one eating and drinking. Bel is not “living.” He merely *appears* to live because of the ruse of his crafty priests.

Daniel’s cunning exceeds that of the priests. He arranges to trap them in their lie by exposing the trap door. He has servants put ashes on the floor in Bel’s temple so that the priests’ surreptitious activities will leave tangible evidence (14-15). The next morning the king and Daniel go to the temple and find no food on Bel’s table. The king, failing to notice the tell-tale footprints on the floor, is so excited that he loudly praises Bel (16-19). Daniel has a second occasion to laugh as he points out the footprints to the king (19-20), who angrily demands the priests show him their secret doors (21). Their lie is exposed. The priests are killed (22).<sup>63</sup> And they are not the only ones who meet destruction as a result of Bel’s failure to eat and to drink – that is, his failure to qualify as “living.” The king gives over Bel, along with his temple, to Daniel for demolition (22). The epithet “the living God” thus functions in the first part of Bel and the Dragon TH to separate Daniel’s God, the God of Israel, from an idol, a (false) god of Babylon. It is not

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<sup>62</sup> Everding (“The Living God,” 242-43) notes that the first occurrence of the epithet in Bel and the Dragon “signifies the God who has the power to determine the destiny of men (i.e., to kill or make alive),” but he neither defends this claim nor explores the implications for a reading of the entire narrative.

<sup>63</sup> In OG, it is not explicit that the priests of Bel have been killed. The king hands them over to Daniel (παρέδωκεν) before destroying Bel (τὸν βηλ κατέστρεψε). In TH, the king kills them (καὶ ἀπέκτεινεν αὐτοὺς ὁ βασιλεύς) and then Daniel destroys Bel and Bel’s temple.



only God who lives and an idol who does not, though. The worshiper of “the living God” lives; the worshipers of the idol (who is not living) die.

With Bel out of the way, the second part of the story begins. The king next turns to a dragon whom the Babylonians revere (23) and reasons with Daniel: “You are not able to say that this is not a living god (θεὸς ζῶν), so worship him” (24).<sup>64</sup> It is as if the king is desperate to show Daniel that the Babylonians have a god who lives. Bel did not qualify, so he moves to the dragon. In response, Daniel uses the epithet once again of his God: “I will worship the Lord my God because he is a living God” (θεὸς ζῶν; 25). Daniel thus rejects the living status of the dragon, and he offers to prove the dragon’s failure to qualify with a fitting demonstration: he will kill it (ἀποκτενῶ τὸν δράκοντα; 25).

With the king’s permission, Daniel proceeds. Upon eating Daniel’s homemade cakes, the dragon dramatically bursts open (διερράγη) and thus literally can no longer be understood as the “living” anything (27). Carey Moore captures well the irony here in his commentary section heading for the dragon scene: “The Snake: A Living ‘God’ who Ate and Died.”<sup>65</sup> Yet, I suggest, a slightly more precise construal would put the quotation marks around “Living” rather than “God,” since the contest is about which god is living (versus the OG, in which the contest is about which one is a *god*). As Everding observes, Daniel’s concluding remark – “See your objects of worship” (27) – “classifies together

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<sup>64</sup> In the OG version of verse 24, the king points out that the dragon “lives,” but he does not use the epithet. That is, he suggests that Daniel should worship the dragon because it “lives,” but he does not call it a “living god.”

<sup>65</sup> Moore, *The Additions*, 139.

the inanimate and animate gods which have been destroyed and thus are not entitled to be called ‘living.’”<sup>66</sup>

Everding is incorrect, however, to claim that there is no “further commentary on [the epithet’s] meaning” beyond verse 27. There is much action yet to occur, and the life/death motif continues. Bel has been demolished. Bel’s priests have been put to death. The dragon is now dead. And the Babylonians are unhappy about all of it (28).

They hold Cyrus responsible:

And when it happened that the Babylonians heard, they were extremely indignant and conspired against the king, and they said, “The king has become a Jew (Ιουδαῖος γέγονεν). He has pulled Bel down and killed the dragon and struck down the priests” (28).

The narrative does not comment on whether their accusation is true. I agree with Cohen that this moment is not intended to show that the king has converted to Judaism.<sup>67</sup>

Rather, it demonstrates that the king’s actions have been received as sympathetic to Judaism, which gives the Babylonians a reason to disparage him. They are so displeased, in fact, that they devise the narrative’s final life-and-death contest, which pits the king against Daniel. They threaten to kill the king and his household unless he hands Daniel over to them (29). The king accedes, and the Babylonians throw Daniel into a den of lions who have been starved “so that they would devour Daniel” (ἵνα καταφάγωσιν τὸν

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<sup>66</sup> Everding, “The Living God,” 246.

<sup>67</sup> Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 153. See also Collins’ comment that the expression “to become a Jew” in Bel and the Dragon (and in 2 Macc 9:17) reflects “a Gentile perspective on what it means to become a Jew” (“‘The King has Become a Jew.’ The Perspective on the Gentile World in Bel and the Snake” in *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of, and in Dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel*, eds. J. Andrew Overman and Robert S. MacLennan [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999], 340).

Δανιηλ; 30-31).<sup>68</sup> After several days, the king comes to mourn for Daniel, whom he assumes the lions have killed (40).

Yet Daniel lives! Surprised and delighted, Cyrus praises Daniel's God: "Great are you, Lord, the God of Daniel, and there is not another besides you" (41). The perceptive reader will remember that this is the second time the king has exclaimed praise for a deity (cf. 18 ["You are great, Bel!"]) upon discovering the god's (presumed or genuine) act of power. When the king thought Bel had proven that he was indeed living, he shouted his praise. Now, the king shouts in praise of Daniel's God. The earlier exclamation extolling Bel, whose position as "living" has been exposed as false and who is no longer a viable object of worship, stands in marked contrast to the present moment. While the king does not use the adjective "living" to describe Daniel's God, the narrative leads the reader to draw the conclusion that God's provision of life to Daniel is evidence that his God is indeed living. Finally, in a conclusion fitting to this tale concerned with who is living and who is not, the king sentences those who tried to kill Daniel to their own instruments of death – the hungry lions (42). At the end of the narrative, then, Daniel lives, and Daniel's God alone receives praise. Daniel's God is the only one who has given real evidence of deserving the epithet "living God."

Erich Gruen has pointed to Daniel's cleverness and apparent mischievousness as evidence that "theology hardly gets top billing" in *Bel and the Dragon*.<sup>69</sup> By my reading, however, the narrative pivots on a theological question: "whose god is truly 'living'?"

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<sup>68</sup> For varying opinions on the relationship of the story of Daniel in the lions' den here and in Daniel 6, see Wills, *The Jew in the Court*, 135-38; and Collins, *Daniel*, 264.

<sup>69</sup> Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 171-72.

Indeed, this question drives the plot from beginning to end. While the traditional name for this story is *Bel and the Dragon*, a more precise title might be “*Bel and the Dragon and the Living God*,” for the tale divides into three episodes,<sup>70</sup> sequentially illustrating whether Bel, the dragon, or Daniel’s God is a living god:

- Episode 1      (1-22) – Bel **is not** a living god.
- Episode 2      (23-28) – The dragon **is not** a living god.
- Episode 3      (29-42) – Daniel’s God **is** a living God (as Daniel had initially claimed).

The contest over who is a “living god” is thus the governing trope which organizes the narrative. John Collins writes that *Bel and the Dragon* “is primarily a demonstration that the gods of the Babylonians are not ‘living gods’.”<sup>71</sup> Yet the point of Episode 3 is that Israel’s God *is* living.<sup>72</sup> The king is indeed “persuaded of the futility of idols by Daniel’s demonstration” (as Collins claims), but the king is only persuaded of the worthiness of *Daniel’s God* once God has demonstrated active power by saving Daniel’s life.<sup>73</sup> Through these three episodes, the reader too is led to affirm that it is indeed Daniel’s God who is living, the “winner” of the contests which the four uses of the epithet set up in the narrative (5-6 and 24-25).

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<sup>70</sup> For a summary of scholars’ positions on whether *Bel and the Dragon* divides into two or into three sub-stories, see Ronald H. van der Bergh, “Reading ‘*Bel and the Dragon*’ as Narrative: A Comparison between the Old Greek and Theodotion,” *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 20 (2009), 311-12. Steussy divides both versions into three episodes, naming the third “The Lion Pit,” a title which I do not prefer because it does not make it clear that the main actor is Daniel’s God (*Gardens in Babylon*, 84). As Steussy recognizes, Daniel’s God “proves very active indeed” in the final narrative sequence (*Gardens in Babylon*, 86). She helpfully observes, furthermore, that both OG and TH have Daniel’s God “[redefine] divinity, shifting its terms from eating (which Bel could not do and the serpent died by) to feeding” (*Gardens in Babylon*, 86).

<sup>71</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 270-71.

<sup>72</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 270-71.

<sup>73</sup> Collins quotation from “‘The King has Become a Jew’,” 341.

The stakes of this contest are high for its human participants, for whether one lives or dies in Bel and Dragon is dependent upon whether one's god is "living." Daniel worships "the living God," whose intervention allows Daniel miraculously to survive the lion's den; the worshipers of Bel and the dragon, neither of which is a living god, share the fate of their idols and are destroyed. Yet unlike in the instances of "living God" terminology in Israel's scriptures to which I pointed in the previous chapter, the life/death dichotomy does not divide along ethnic lines. Indeed, Persian King Cyrus survives. Collins has remarked that the king is portrayed positively in Bel and the Dragon, and that the work is hostile towards idols but not gentiles.<sup>74</sup> Gruen, by contrast, has argued that Cyrus comes across as a ridiculous, fickle monarch whose naiveté the narrator seeks to expose and whose decisions are easily manipulated.<sup>75</sup> He is essentially, in Gruen's view, the punch line of a Jewish author's joke. Gruen is right that the king is malleable. Yet, I suggest, his malleability is not, in the view of the author, a liability. It is a virtue, since it leads him ultimately to acknowledge the God of Israel. From the very beginning of the story, the king's decisions are governed by a certain logic whose premise the author would affirm as sound: only a god which can be shown to be living deserves worship.

Claudia Bergmann has pointed out that depictions of idol destruction in Second Temple Judaism are novel vis-à-vis those in the Hebrew Bible because their human characters use a form of logic to conclude that the lifeless idol should be destroyed:

Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible do human agents act based on their own understanding that idols are made by hand, and that they are lifeless, powerless,

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<sup>74</sup> Collins, "'The King has Become a Jew'," 337, 342.

<sup>75</sup> Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 171-72.

and cannot compare to God, and thus have no right to exist. Only in the literature of Second Temple Judaism will there emerge this type of self-initiative as the reason for destruction of idols.<sup>76</sup>

Bergmann cites Exod 32:30; Judg 6:25-26; 1 Sam 5:1-5; 2 Kgs 19:8//Isa 37:19; 1 Chron 14:12; Isa 2:18; 44:9, 11; Ezek 30:13; and Mic 1:7; 5:13-14 as evidence that idols are only destroyed in the Hebrew Bible either (1) by God in the future, (2) by humans at God's command, or (3) as a result of being put near the ark of the covenant.<sup>77</sup> She further demonstrates that only in the literature of Second Temple Judaism (versus the Hebrew Bible) do authors give accounts of the evolution of idol worship in human history as the result of "cruel spirits" (*Jub.* 11:4), grief over a loved one who is now commemorated as a "divinized statue" (*Wis* 14:14-20), adoration of a now-distant ruler (*Wis* 14; cf. *Let. Aris.* 135), desire for profit (*Apoc. Ab.* 2:1), or Israel's aspiration to be like other nations (*L.A.B.* 12:2).<sup>78</sup> Significantly, Hellenistic Jewish authors who oppose idol worship argue against it without reference to Israel's covenant or to Israel-centric events such as the Exodus.<sup>79</sup>

Thus, for Second Temple Jews, the motivation not to worship idols is no longer simply to comply with the fact that God told Israel not to (as part of their covenant). A new motivation has developed: avoiding idols is the logical thing to do. This shift in argumentation against idol worship corresponds to the shift in "living God" terminology I

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<sup>76</sup> Claudia Bergmann, "Idol Worship in Bel and the Dragon and Other Jewish Literature from the Second Temple Period," in *Septuagint Research: Issues and Challenges in the Study of the Greek Jewish Scriptures*, eds. Wolfgang Kraus and R. Glenn Wooden [Leiden: Brill, 2006], 210.

<sup>77</sup> Bergmann, "Idol Worship," 210.

<sup>78</sup> Bergmann, "Idol Worship," 210-12.

<sup>79</sup> Bergmann, "Idol Worship," 213.

have outlined here, in which the epithet draws boundaries along lines of religious practice rather than ethnicity. Indeed, if the reason not to worship idols is because of God's prohibition of idolatry in the covenant with Israel, then only Israel is required to avoid idol worship because only Israel is bound by the covenant. If, on the other hand, another reason not to worship idols is because idol worship is irrational, then all humans should avoid idolatry because human rationality is available to everyone, not just Israel. It is possible that the shift from a prohibition which is specific to Israel to one which is universally applicable is what influenced the author of *Bel and the Dragon* TH to imagine a gentile who eschews (dead) idols and instead worships "the living God."

### **Synthesis and Conclusions: 'The Living God' in Hellenistic Judaism**

In the Hellenistic Jewish narratives treated in this chapter, the epithet "(the) living God" constructs and maintains boundaries which distinguish Jew from non-Jew (*Esther* OG), faithful Jew from apostate Jew (*3 Maccabees*), the God of the Jews from the gods of the gentiles (*Daniel* OG and *Daniel* TH), and the dominion of God of the Jews from the subservient status of gentile kings (all of the above). Moreover, Israel's "living God" is, in each narrative, associated with human life and death. Yet, unlike in Deuteronomy and the narratives of the Deuteronomistic History, the life/death dichotomy does not in each story correspond to ethnic Jew/non-Jew. Rather, these narratives imagine scenarios in which non-Jews may face "the living God" and yet live.

Previous scholars have not missed the fact that Hellenistic Jews have a new perspective of the relationship of "the living God" to gentiles. In his extensive cataloguing of "living God" terminology in Second Temple Judaism, Everding claims

that the epithet begins to occur “in settings which represent an openness to the Gentiles.”<sup>80</sup> He notes the novelty of gentile kings’ using the epithet to address the God of the Jews and to affirm this God’s kingship; he states, furthermore, that the epithet comes “to designate the God of, rather than destroyer of, the Gentiles.”<sup>81</sup> In my estimation, a more precise formulation (based on my findings in this chapter) is that the appearance of the epithet no longer guarantees (threatened or actual) gentile destruction. The gentiles who successfully avoid death in these instances are not recognizing the God of the Jews as their own god, but rather acknowledging the authority of Israel’s “living God” and recognizing this God’s ability to give life. They do not, in Shaye Cohen’s words, “[cross] the boundary and [become] a Jew” (on which, more below).<sup>82</sup>

Mark Goodwin also observes that Hellenistic Jews have a “more universalistic view of the living God” than that represented in Israel’s scriptures.<sup>83</sup> He is, like Everding, right to point to a trend of openness to gentiles in later Jewish usage of the epithet. In my judgment, though, Goodwin’s claim that “[f]or Hellenistic Jews, the living God was no longer simply the covenantal God of Israel, but also the universal lord and

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<sup>80</sup> Everding, “The Living God,” 194. Everding traces three broad developments of “living God” terminology in Second Temple Judaism: the epithet was adapted (1) to designate God as “everlasting”; (2) to perform an apologetic function within stories of martyrdom or deliverance; (3) to polemicize against idols in “stylized formulations” (“The Living God,” 275-76).

<sup>81</sup> Everding, “The Living God,” 194. When Everding says “destroyer,” he refers specifically to the divine warrior tradition in Israel’s scriptures where Israel’s God fights on their behalf against gentile adversaries.

<sup>82</sup> I take this turn of phrase from Cohen’s influential essay entitled, “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew” (*Harvard Theological Review* 82 [1989], 13-33 [also published as pages 140-74 in *The Beginnings of Jewishness*]), in which he lays out a range of possibilities for gentile boundary-crossing which do not entail conversion to Judaism.

<sup>83</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 65.



creator” overstates the evidence.<sup>84</sup> He summarizes, “...the superior character of the living God for Hellenistic Jews is rooted in his identity as the creator, who made the world, gave life, and continues to give life in sustaining creation,” and he claims that the notion of the living God as creator “is not one facet of the epithet’s significance among others” in Hellenistic Judaism but is, rather, “a root idea.”<sup>85</sup> Yet, in the Hellenistic Jewish narratives I have surveyed here, only two of eleven instances of the “living God” epithet are explicitly connected to creation (Daniel 5:23 OG and Bel and the Dragon 5 TH).<sup>86</sup> Goodwin is thus right to point to “the living God” as creator God in Hellenistic Judaism, but he too quickly assimilates the occurrences of the epithet to one another in order to draw the synthetic conclusion that this was the *primary* meaning among Hellenistic Jews. This is not the main point of most of these narratives.

The epithet in Daniel OG, for example, conveys that Israel’s God is the source of gentile rulers’ power, combating the notion that the gentiles themselves are sovereign (or even divine). The living God’s wielding of life and death is presented as a *metaphor* for God’s giving and taking away of imperial power. In Esther OG, Israel’s God is indeed in

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<sup>84</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 65.

<sup>85</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 67. I am more persuaded by this formulation, where he does not mention the creation motif: the “living God” was conceived as “lord of all people, active in the affairs of Gentiles as well as Jews” and, in contrast to gentiles’ idols, “had a truly ‘living’ character that manifested itself in concrete acts of deliverance and judgment among Gentiles as well as Jews” (Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 84).

<sup>86</sup> Elsewhere, Goodwin appears to rely on something he says is *implicit* to make his point: “The creator theme is implicit in the rational criticism of idols and in the antithetical formulations which oppose the living God and idols” (*Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 82). Goodwin also cites *Jub.* 21.4, which I treat in a subsequent chapter. The book of *Jubilees* draws impenetrable boundaries between Jews and Gentiles. See Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 68-92; and Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 67-86.

charge of cosmos and kingdom, but “the living God” is not represented as creator.<sup>87</sup>

Neither is “the living God” connected to creation in 3 Maccabees. Against Goodwin, then, I have shown that there was a variety of views of “the living God” in Hellenistic Judaism. I agree with him, however, that these authors have a “more universalistic view” than did the writers of Israel’s scriptures.

The final scholar whose work I would like to engage here has written not about the epithet “(the) living God” but about boundaries of Jewish identity during the Second Temple period. In *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, Shaye Cohen argues that a philological shift occurred in the years following the Hasmonean rebellion in which the ethnically-specific word *Ioudaios* (“Judean”) often took on two additional significations – one political and the other religious (“Jew”):

Behind the philological shift from ‘Judaean’ to ‘Jew’ is a significant development in the history of Judaism: the emergence of the possibility that a gentile could be enfranchised as a citizen of the household of Israel, either politically or religiously.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Goodwin does not consider this variant from the creator motif because he treats Esther and 3 Maccabees in a separate chapter from Daniel OG and Bel and the Dragon TH. As I discussed in Chapter One, Goodwin’s approach to studying the epithet entails grouping together individual occurrences, across various texts, which appear to him to be thematically linked. He treats “the living God” in Second Temple Jewish narratives under two organizational headings: (1) Eschatological sonship under the New Covenant, and (2) Hellenistic Jewish Monotheism. Under the first rubric, he discusses the epithet’s use in Hosea 2:1 LXX (1:10 MT) – “children of the living God” – in designating the eschatological children of Israel’s covenantal God in *Jubilees* 1.24-25; 3 Macc 6:28; Esth 8:12q LXX; and *Jos. Asen.* 19.8. Under his second category, Goodwin discusses the use of the epithet in stylized formulations of idol polemic (“living God” versus “deaf and dumb idols”). Here he draws comparisons among the epithet’s appearance in Dan 5:23, 6:26-27 OG, Bel and the Dragon Th 5, and *Jos. Asen.* 8.5. For a full critique of Goodwin’s methodology, see Chapter One.

<sup>88</sup> Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 3.

The word *Ioudaios* thus gained new possibilities of definition as a religious and political category, and this shift had dramatic consequences for how the boundary between Jew and “other” was understood. That boundary became permeable:

In contrast with ethnic identity, religious and political identities are mutable: gentiles can abandon their false gods and accept the true God, and non-Judaeans can become citizens of the Judaeian state. Thus, with the emergence of these new definitions in the second century B.C.E., the metaphoric boundary separating Judaeans from non-Judaeans became more and more permeable.<sup>89</sup>

The new possibilities for the relationship of “the living God” to gentiles in Hellenistic Jewish narratives, which I have outlined in this chapter, coincide with this broader paradigm shift in Judaism at the time which resulted in permeable border lines. That is, when non-Jews were crossing the boundary “on the ground” (sociologically), Jewish authors were re-imagining ways in which their “living God” could relate to non-Jews. In Esther OG, 3 Maccabees, Daniel OG, and Daniel TH (in Bel and the Dragon), four different gentile rulers acclaim the God of Israel as “living”; they do not become Jews but are included with those Jews who serve “the living God” and so receive life. The epithet which in the narratives of Israel’s scriptures would have accompanied, or ensured, their demise now appears on their lips in reference to Israel’s God.

Yet there is one boundary consistent with the epithet’s function in Israel’s scriptures which is amplified in these Hellenistic Jewish appearances: the boundary line between Israel’s God and other gods. Israel’s God is different from the others because Israel’s God is “living” – active, powerful, and life-giving – and the epithet serves to separate this God from all others – the ones that belong to the gentiles. Thus, now that

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<sup>89</sup> Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 109-110.

the meaning of *Ioudaios* allows for the possibility of gentiles crossing the boundary, the epithet is used more frequently in the defense of (living) God against gentile god instead of (living) God against gentile person. Moreover, the accompanying life/death dichotomy draws religious rather than ethnic boundary lines, a circumstance which fits well with the notion that it matters more whom one worships than to whose (genealogical) family one belongs or from which geographical area one comes (“Judea”).

Yet, as I have stated previously, simply because it was possible for gentiles to become *Ioudaioi* (from a philological standpoint), and they sometimes did become Jews (from a sociological standpoint), does not mean that they *should* become Jews or that all Jews wanted them to do so (from an ideological standpoint). Indeed, even though the narratives treated in this chapter have a more optimistic view of the relationship between “the living God” and gentiles, they neither depict nor defend conversion. In the next chapter, I argue that *Joseph and Aseneth* uses the epithet “(the) living God” to mount a theological defense for the sociological reality of religious incorporation, that is, to explain in *theological* terms how and why gentile inclusion in the people of Israel is possible.

## CHAPTER THREE

### REWRITTEN GENTILES: ISRAEL'S 'LIVING GOD' IN *JOSEPH AND ASENETH*

#### **Introduction**

In the narratives of Israel's scriptures discussed in Chapter One, Israel's "living God" is a formidable foe of non-Israelites, as the epithet constructs discursive boundaries not only between Israel and "other" but also between Israel's God and other nations. Yet, as I have already noted, this portrayal of YHWH is of course not ubiquitous in Israel's scriptures, and the dichotomy of life/death does not always correspond to the ethnic binary of Israelite/non-Israelite. In later Hellenistic Jewish narratives, "living God" terminology continues to separate insiders from outsiders, but the epithet's boundary-drawing along lines of religious practice rather than ethnic descent better reflects the actual complexity of the relationship between Israel/YHWH and non-Israelites in the biblical narratives. One moment of messiness in this relationship in Israel's scriptures is the biblical patriarch Joseph's marriage to Egyptian Aseneth. The marriage is mentioned only briefly in Gen 41:45, without interpretive comment. Aseneth's only other appearances in Genesis mention her bearing Joseph's sons (Gen 41:50; 46:20). *Joseph and Aseneth* imaginatively expands on Aseneth's story, recounting her conversion from idolater to worshiper of Joseph's God and her ensuing adventures as Joseph's bride. The

epithet “(the) living God” appears in three scenes in the manuscript tradition of *Aseneth*’s story: (1) at her initial rejection by Joseph, (2) in her prayer of repentance, and (3) in her ultimate incorporation into the people of God. I argue in this chapter that *Joseph and Aseneth* not only rewrites (part of) Genesis, but it also re-imagines the relationship of Israel’s “living God” to gentiles.

The date and provenance of *Joseph and Aseneth* are disputed. Since my argument about the function of the epithet “(the) living God” in the narrative does not depend on a particular originating place or point in time, I suspend historicizing the narrative until Chapter Four, in which I contend that the concerns I identify in the story fit well within Hellenistic Judaism in Egypt. In this chapter, I assume only those characteristics of *Aseneth*’s tale on which scholars agree: (1) *Joseph and Aseneth* was originally composed in Greek, and (2) the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* was extremely familiar with Israel’s scriptures (LXX/OG).<sup>1</sup> The text of *Aseneth*’s story *is* a matter which demands preliminary attention, though, since the narrative survives in more than one form. Before I turn to the epithet, I must address which text – or more precisely, texts – I am interpreting.

### **The Text of *Joseph and Aseneth***

To write of “the” narrative of *Joseph and Aseneth* betrays the multiplicity of textual witnesses representing more than one form of the story. An original text is elusive, as the tale survives in sixteen Greek manuscripts, none earlier than the tenth-

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<sup>1</sup> See esp. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 69-71; Delling, “Einwirkungen der Sprache,” 29-56; and Docherty, “*Joseph and Aseneth*: Rewritten Bible or Narrative Expansion?,” 27-48.

century CE, and in eight versions, adding up to over eighty manuscripts in all. Scholars do not agree on which manuscripts are closest to an original. Two attempts to reconstruct the earliest text of *Joseph and Aseneth* have dominated scholarship on this narrative for forty years: Christoph Burchard's "longer version" (hereafter, Bu), based principally on a family of witnesses he originally labeled *b* [E G FW Syr Arm L1 L2 Ngr Rum], and Marc Philonenko's "shorter version" (hereafter, Ph), which was based on a distinct witness family represented by *d* [BDSlav].<sup>2</sup> Since the publication of these reconstructions, *Joseph and Aseneth* scholars have typically mounted arguments for the priority of one or the other and then used, sometimes with modifications, either Burchard's or Philonenko's text as the basis of their own scholarship.<sup>3</sup>

Recently, Patricia Ahearne-Kroll has challenged this practice by showing that both reconstructions are problematic. She demonstrates that the transmission history of

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<sup>2</sup> Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*; Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth*; "Ein vorläufiger griechischer Text"; and *Joseph und Aseneth*. Burchard organized the manuscripts into the four family groups represented by the letters *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d* in his 1965 monograph. In 2003, he subdivided family *b*, creating a fifth family, *f* ("Ein neuer Versuch zur Textgeschichte von Joseph und Aseneth," in *Der Freund des Menschen. Festschrift für Georg Christian Macholz zur Vollenung des 70. Lebensjahres*, eds. A Meinhold and A. Berlejung [Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2003], 237-46). For the purposes of this dissertation, I use "family *b*" to refer to Burchard's original group of witnesses belonging to family *b* rather than to distinguish the newer, smaller family *b* from family *f*. For a recent, detailed history of scholarship on the text (including critique), see Patricia Ahearne-Kroll, "Joseph and Aseneth and Jewish Identity" 14-60. For a description of the individual manuscripts, see Christoph Burchard, "Joseph and Aseneth: A New Translation and Introduction" in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 178-79.

<sup>3</sup> Notable examples of scholars who have used Burchard's text include Chesnutt (*From Death to Life*) and Humphrey (*Joseph and Aseneth*). As Ahearne-Kroll observes, "[n]early all scholarly discussions of [Joseph and Aseneth] since 1980 have depended on Burchard's reconstruction" ("Joseph and Aseneth and Jewish Identity," 7, n. 10). Uta Barbara Fink has published an adapted version of Burchard's text (*Joseph und Aseneth: Revision des griechischen Textes und Edition der zweiten lateinischen Übersetzung* [Walter de Gruyter, 2008]). Ross Kraemer (*When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998]) and Angela Standhartinger (*Das Frauenbild im Judentum der hellenistischen Zeit. Ein Beitrag anhand von 'Joseph und Aseneth'* [Leiden: Brill, 1995]) challenged this consensus by arguing that Philonenko's reconstruction is closer to the original text.

*Joseph and Aseneth* is much more complex than scholars have appreciated, as there is significant variation *within* each family group of witnesses, and not just between family groups.<sup>4</sup> The manuscript evidence thus suggests that Aseneth's story was not transmitted down straight genealogical lines (that is, moving either from an original "longer" version to a secondary "shorter" version, or vice versa). On the basis of this evidence, Ahearne-Kroll contends that the entire enterprise of establishing an original text for *Joseph and Aseneth* is impossible.

Rejecting the notion of using a particular reconstruction, Ahearne-Kroll suggests a more cautious approach to the text of Aseneth's story, one which I find to be extremely useful and which I adopt in my treatment of *Joseph and Aseneth*.<sup>5</sup> Adapting a model from Christine M. Thomas' work on the *Acts of Peter*, Ahearne-Kroll suggests that scholars should think of the "fixed" elements in the textual tradition of *Joseph and Aseneth* as part of a "core narrative," which she calls the "fabula," and think of the differences among the textual witnesses as "fluid" elements belonging to individual expressions of the *Joseph and Aseneth* tradition.<sup>6</sup> She explains:

The textual witnesses preserve a remarkably extensive fabula, but they also disclose enough variation from each other to indicate that the transmission and reception of the JA tradition (i.e., the fluid quality of the transmission of JA) demonstrates that audiences received JA in a variety of ways. The fixed quality of this tradition, however, also confirms that no matter which witnesses audiences

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<sup>4</sup> See Ahearne-Kroll, "*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity," 73-74.

<sup>5</sup> Rather than building on Ahearne-Kroll's *conclusions*, I am following her *method* of handling the textual evidence and am employing it as I reach original conclusions. Throughout I have relied on Burchard's critical apparatus in *Joseph und Aseneth* (2003), supplemented by Philonenko's apparatus, to discern what the individual witnesses attest in each instance.

<sup>6</sup> Christine M. Thomas, *The Acts of Peter, Gospel Literature, and the Ancient Novel: Rewriting the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).



heard or read, they nevertheless encountered particular features that were associated with the JA tradition.<sup>7</sup>

In this chapter, I am interested in both the fixed elements of the tradition – the plot, characters, imagery, and themes which are foundational to Aseneth’s story in all of its forms – and the fluid components belonging to individual witnesses (or groups of witnesses) which build on this foundation in distinctive ways. In the following examination of the epithet “(the) living God” in *Joseph and Aseneth*, I employ Ahearne-Kroll’s approach by examining the earliest witnesses (those belonging to textual families *b* and *d*) in order to discern what may be said about the epithet’s meaning and function in the “core narrative” about Aseneth. Only then do I interpret the instances of the epithet found in the fluid part of the textual tradition as distinct expressions which build upon this common foundation. I begin with the single appearance of the epithet found in both of the earliest families of witnesses.

### **The Living God in *Joseph and Aseneth***

Joseph uses the epithet “(the) living God” after he initially meets Aseneth and then immediately, and quite unexpectedly, prevents her from greeting him with a kiss and explains why he cannot share this gesture. Ahearne-Kroll includes this narrative moment in her formulation of the fabula, summarizing the *b*- and *d*-family commonalities in this way:

Aseneth comes to greet Joseph, but when she reaches out to kiss him, he immediately rescinds his invitation. He proceeds to give a lengthy reason as to why he cannot touch her: those who worship God consume life-giving food and

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<sup>7</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, “*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity,” 268.

cannot kiss those who practice idolatry, who consume food that brings destruction. Because Aseneth practices idolatry, Joseph will not kiss her.<sup>8</sup>

A closer examination of the text of this passage reveals that the “life” motif is much more fundamental to this passage than Ahearne-Kroll’s summary would suggest. As a means of illustrating the commonalities between the two earliest textual families in this passage, the following chart provides Burchard’s text for the *b*-family version with the lines which do not appear in the shorter *d*-family version in brackets. Differences among individual witnesses are detailed in the footnotes, and my explanation of the chart appears below:

**Table 1: *Jos. Asen. Bu/Ph 8:5a* Text and Translation**

8:5a (Burchard’s text; brackets mine)	8:5a (Burchard’s trans.; brackets mine)
οὐκ ἔστι προσῆκον ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεῖ ὃς εὐλογεῖ τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ τὸν θεὸν τὸν ζῶντα <sup>9</sup> καὶ ἐσθίει ἄρτον εὐλογημένον [ζωῆς <sup>10</sup> καὶ πίνει ποτήριον εὐλογημένον ἀθανασίας <sup>11</sup> καὶ χρίεται χρίσματι εὐλογημένῳ] ἀφθαρσίας <sup>12</sup>	It is not fitting for a man who worships God, who will bless with his mouth the living God and eat blessed bread [of life and drink a blessed cup of immortality and anoint himself with blessed ointment] of incorruptibility

The epithet “the living God” (Syr Arm L2 L1 BDSlav) or the anarthrous “living God” (E

<sup>8</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, “*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity,” 82.

<sup>9</sup> Greek witnesses E and D have the anarthrous θεὸν ζῶντα.

<sup>10</sup> Family *d* witnesses do not attest the bracketed text. Witness E from family *b* does not attest the word ζωῆς.

<sup>11</sup> Some *b* witnesses lack the key word ἀθανασίας (E FW G L1 W), though its equivalent does appear in Arm and L2.

<sup>12</sup> FW do not have the relative pronoun and four clauses which describe the God-fearing man and thus do not attest the epithet here or any of the three key phrases which contain “life” language/imagery. G likewise does not attest the epithet or the key phrases here since it lacks the whole section of Bu 2:3b-10:1a.

D) is attested here by the major witnesses of families *b* and *d*.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, in both textual families, the God-fearing man's activity of blessing this "living God" is characterized by one or more parallel acts of symbolic consumption, each of which employs language associated with "life" to denote the God-fearer's concomitant blessings. With minor variations, family *b* witnesses say that the worshiper of the "living God" also "eats blessed bread of life" (ἐσθίει ἄρτον εὐλογημένον ζωῆς),<sup>14</sup> "drinks a blessed cup of immortality" (πίνει ποτήριον εὐλογημένον ἀθανασίας),<sup>15</sup> and "anoints (himself with) a blessed chrism of imperishability" (χρίεται χρίσματι εὐλογημένῳ ἀφθαρσίας).<sup>16</sup>

Family *d* witnesses say simply that the God-fearing man who blesses the "living God" also "eats bread of imperishability" (ἀφθαρσίας). While the motif of life and death is more evident and prevalent in the family *b* bread-cup-chrism triad, the family *d* version of this passage also depicts life as a benefit of worshiping the "living God" through its use of the word "imperishability," which signifies eternal life. The word ἀφθαρσία often appears in contexts which also employ ζάω or its cognate noun (e.g., 4 Macc 17:12

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<sup>13</sup> The witnesses Syr Arm L2 L1 BDSlav have τὸν θεὸν τὸν ζῶντα or its translational equivalent. E and D have θεὸν ζῶντα. As indicated above, the only manuscripts which do not contain the epithet at this point are from family *b*: FW and G, the latter of which does not contain the entire section of Bu 2.3b-10.1a. (FW do, however, have the epithet in the following sentence.) All the witnesses belonging to secondary families *c* and *a* attest "the living God" in 8:5.

<sup>14</sup> On "bread of life" in *Joseph and Aseneth* and in the Gospel of John, see Randall Chesnutt, "Bread of Life in Joseph and Aseneth and John 6" in *Johannine Studies: Essays in Honor of Frank Pack*, ed. James E. Priest (Malibu: Pepperdine UP, 1989), 1-16. One family *b* witness which contains this line lacks the key word ζωῆς (E). FW (and G, which lacks the entire passage) have none of the four clauses which describe the God-fearing man.

<sup>15</sup> Some family *b* witnesses lack the key word ἀθανασίας (E FW G L1 W), though its equivalent does appear in Arm and L2.

<sup>16</sup> There are slight variations of grammatical case and of vocabulary in the textual witnesses for χρίσματι εὐλογημένῳ, none of which affect my argument here.

[ἀφθαρσία ἐν ζωῇ πολυχρονίῳ]; Rom 2:7 [ζωὴν αἰώνιον]; 1 Cor 15:42, 50, 53-54) or in conjunction with plot events featuring life and death (e.g., 4 Macc 9:22).<sup>17</sup> In both of the earliest streams of textual transmission, Joseph worships the “living God” and receives life as a result.

The second half of Joseph’s sentence depicts Aseneth’s present practice as the inverse of his own. This passage is remarkably stable across both families *b* and *d*:

**Table 2: *Jos. Asen. Bu/Ph 8:5b* Text and Translation**

8:5b (Burchard’s text) <sup>18</sup>	8:5b (Burchard’s trans.)
φιλησαι γυναῖκα ἄλλοτρίαν ἥτις εὐλογεῖ τῷ στόματι αὐτῆς εἰδωλα νεκρὰ καὶ κωφὰ <sup>19</sup> καὶ ἐσθίει ἐκ τῆς τραπέζης αὐτῶν ἄρτον ἀγχόνης <sup>20</sup> καὶ πίνει ἐκ τῆς σπονδῆς αὐτῶν <sup>21</sup> ποτήριον ἐνέδρας <sup>22</sup> καὶ χρίεται χρίσματι ἀπωλείας	to kiss a strange woman who will bless with her mouth dead and [mute] idols and eat from their table bread of strangulation and drink from their libation a cup of insidiousness and anoint herself with ointment of destruction

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Wis 2:23, where ἀφθαρσία is associated with God’s creation of humans.

<sup>18</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I present Burchard’s text in this chart as a base and use footnotes to show the relevant variants for all *b* and *d* witnesses.

<sup>19</sup> Some witnesses reverse the order of “dead” and “mute.” The Syriac version indicates that they are “dead” and “useless.”

<sup>20</sup> The only significant Greek variant in the manuscripts for ἄρτον ἀγχόνης (“bread of strangulation”) is a singular occurrence of ἄρτον αἰσχύνης (“bread of shame”) in D; the other two family *d* witnesses (B and Slav) have ἀγχόνης. The Syriac version indicates that the bread “of strangulation” is also “stinking.” The Armenian version has “food” rather than “bread.” L1 has *panem* (or *panes*) *anchonis*. E lacks the mention of bread altogether.

<sup>21</sup> Burchard’s apparatus indicates that witness E reads ἐκ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων ὧν ὁ θεὸς βδελύττει ὁ ὕψιστος rather than “from their libation.”

<sup>22</sup> For ποτήριον ἐνέδρας, L1 has *calicem anedras calicem occultum*; Arm has “a cup of the wine of deceit”; Syr has simply “deceit.”

From the outset, Joseph's words mark Aseneth as a stranger (γυναῖκα ἀλλοτρίαν). Her gods, in contrast to the "living God," are "dead" and "mute." His description of Aseneth's bread-cup-chrism triad, in contrast to his own, is laden with language of danger and death: "strangulation," "treachery," "destruction." In Aseneth's case, neither god nor worshiper lives. The earliest witnesses agree, then, that Israel's "living God" gives life to Joseph and that Aseneth's worship of dead idols yields death.

Yet, the central idea of his speech here is not that Joseph lives and Aseneth does not. His main point (in both families of witnesses) is that *he cannot kiss her* because of it. The epithet in conjunction with the imagery of life and death in Bu/Ph 8:5 functions as a boundary-marker. With his language, Joseph constructs a discursive boundary which denotes their opposing religious statuses vis-à-vis his God. The boundary is one with tangible consequences in the narrative: the handsome hero cannot (yet) kiss the beautiful heroine.

Joseph's next sentence (Bu/Ph 8:6), in both groups of earliest witnesses, employs the epithet again, driving his point home by listing women whom it *is* acceptable to kiss: his mother (τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ) or his mother's sister (Syr), his "sister who is from his tribe and kin" (τὴν ἀδελφὴν τὴν ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς καὶ τῆς συγγενείας αὐτοῦ),<sup>23</sup> and "his wife who is his bedfellow" (τὴν γυναῖκα τὴν σύγκοιτον αὐτοῦ).<sup>24</sup> What they all have in common is that they are women "who bless with their mouth" (αἵτινες τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν)

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<sup>23</sup> There is some wording variation in this phrase in the textual witnesses which does not affect my argument.

<sup>24</sup> Arm and L2 attest an additional mention of the God-fearer's sister.

“the/a living God” (τὸν θεὸν τὸν ζῶντα or θεὸν ζῶντα).<sup>25</sup> The long catalog of people whom Joseph, as a God-fearer, *will* kiss is almost comical in its hyperbolic scope and overdrawn contrast. Burchard’s English translation, with its length and rhythm, lends itself well to the point: Joseph will kiss “his mother and the sister (who is born) of his mother and the sister (who is born) of his clan and family and the wife who shares his bed, (all of) who(m) bless with their mouths the living God” (Bu/Ph 8:6). This second appearance of the epithet further constructs a symbolic boundary enforced by a physical gap: the God-fearing man kisses a lot of women, but not Aseneth.

Imagery of life and death is thus used in 8:5-6 in conjunction with the epithet in order to mark boundaries. Joseph is not talking about physical life and bodily death, of course; it is a figure of speech. But it is a figure of speech with power, with concrete effects, real-world implications: Joseph cannot kiss her, cannot eat with her, cannot even think about marrying her. Aseneth’s idolatry separates her to such a degree that the spiritual, and therefore physical, chasm between her and Joseph is as real as the distinction between life and death. There is continuity here with many of the epithet’s appearances in other narratives I have examined. As in the instances in Israel’s scriptures investigated in Chapter One, the epithet “living God” occurs once more in a context of boundary-drawing between an Israelite and a non-Israelite. As in the epithet’s function in many Hellenistic Jewish narratives (Chapter Two), the boundary delimits who is “in” and who is “out” down a line of religious practice. As in Israel’s scriptures and in post-

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<sup>25</sup> Burchard’s apparatus indicates that all of his standing witnesses except G (which lacks the entire passage) have τὸν θεὸν τὸν ζῶντα, while FW and BD have the anarthrous θεὸν ζῶντα.

biblical narratives, the epithet likewise separates Israel's God from other gods by virtue of the fact that only the God of Israel is able to give life.

As Aseneth's tale continues, though, something unprecedented happens. The non-Israelite expressly, and unequivocally, receives life from "the living God" and joins the people of Israel. In fact, as I show below, the "life" motif is almost overwhelming in its frequent appearances in both of the earliest streams of textual tradition. While in Deuteronomy 4 and 5 LXX, the fundamental mechanism of the living God's gift of life (in that case, to Israel) is the covenant, in *Joseph and Aseneth*, a different theological category provides the principal metaphor through which God's ability to give life is conceived: not covenant, but creation. In the next section, I demonstrate that in both of the earliest forms of Aseneth's story, God's giving of life is formulated in terms of God's creative power – God's original giving of life – with vocabulary and imagery drawn from the creation narratives of Genesis 1-2 LXX.

### **God as Creator of Life in *Joseph and Aseneth***

The expression "new creation" is a popular one among *Joseph and Aseneth* scholars when discussing the heroine's transformation. It is used as an italicized heading in Randall Chesnutt's definitive monograph entitled *From Death to Life*. He correctly claims that Aseneth's conversion "is conceived as transition from death, destruction and corruption...to the life, immortality and incorruption enjoyed by those who worship God."<sup>26</sup> He points to five passages (8:9; 12:1-2; 15:5; and 20:7 [using Burchard's reconstruction and versification]) as evidence that creation imagery is "the language most

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<sup>26</sup> Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 145.

often used to describe Aseneth's conversion."<sup>27</sup> In Christoph Burchard's discussion of conversion as the research area most promising for New Testament studies, he comments that "[t]he most interesting aspect of conversion in JosAs is likely to be its character of 'new creation'."<sup>28</sup> Aseneth occupies a full chapter of Moyer Hubbard's monograph, *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thoughts*. Hubbard is certainly right to comment that "new creation" is "the phrase most often invoked to summarize [Aseneth's] transforming event."<sup>29</sup> Language of "new creation" is a mainstay in *Joseph and Aseneth* scholarship.

Yet the words *καινή* and *κτίσις* never appear together, a fact which some scholars have recognized but not adequately addressed.<sup>30</sup> In this section, I lay out all of the creation language and imagery which appears in the narrative in order to demonstrate that the creation motif is ubiquitous in *both* of the earliest streams of textual tradition (families *b* and *d*) and therefore fundamental to the narrative in all of its forms. I also develop a thesis concerning the *function* of the creation motif within the broader theological aims of the narrative: it characterizes the God of Israel as the creator of all. While interpreters are certainly not wrong to identify "creation" as the fundamental analogy for Aseneth's transformation, then, I suggest that the term "new creation" is imprecise and has caused scholars to overlook an additional function of the creation motif: the way in which it contributes to the narrative's understanding of *God*. I argue

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<sup>27</sup> Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 145-49.

<sup>28</sup> Christoph Burchard, "The Importance of Joseph and Aseneth for the Study of the New Testament: A General Survey and a Fresh Look at the Lord's Supper," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987), 107.

<sup>29</sup> Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought*, 57-58. See especially his bibliographic note in support of this claim (p. 58, n. 15).

<sup>30</sup> For example, see Burchard, "The Importance of Joseph and Aseneth," 107.



that *Joseph and Aseneth* understands the God of Israel as the *universal creator* whose power to give life to *all* in the original creation of the world extends to giving new life to *all*, including Aseneth, an Egyptian.

One methodological point deserves comment before I examine the data. In what follows, I assume that *Joseph and Aseneth* expects its ideal reader to be familiar with Israel's scriptures, and, in particular, the book of Genesis. While the story would make sense on its surface to someone unfamiliar with Genesis, there are clues that the author assumes that the reader knows the biblical book. In one telling example, Aseneth protests her father's suggestion that she marry Joseph in part because she is aware of his imprisonment for molesting Potiphar's wife (Bu 4:10/Ph 4:13), a detail taken from Genesis. She later laments her comment, saying that she has spoken "wicked words" (Bu 6:4/Ph 6:7). In order to understand fully why Aseneth's words were wicked, the reader must remember from Genesis that Joseph was *falsely* accused. He was not guilty of the crime for which he was punished, a fact which *Joseph and Aseneth* never makes explicit but knowledge of which it depends on.<sup>31</sup> I now turn to the creation motif in *Joseph and Aseneth* with this in mind.

The biblically-literate reader's mind is primed to anticipate a tale of (re)creation from the very beginning because the setting of the story, Pentephres's residence, is similar to the setting of God's original creation in Genesis, the Garden of Eden. Genesis 2:9-10 LXX populates Eden with "every tree beautiful in appearance and good for

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<sup>31</sup> See further Docherty, "*Joseph and Aseneth*: Rewritten Bible or Narrative Expansion?," 27-48. Delling shows that the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* often imitates the vocabulary and phrasing of the LXX ("Einwirkungen der Sprache," 29-56).

eating” and with a river which “goes out from Eden to water the paradise” (my trans.).<sup>32</sup>

Chapter 2 of *Joseph and Aseneth* describes a similarly lush landscape within the walls of Pentephres’ courtyard, which teems with trees and an abundant variety of ripe fruits ready for harvest:

**Table 3: *Jos. Asen.* Bu 2:11/Ph 2:19 Text**

Burchard 2:11 <sup>33</sup>	Philonenko 2:19
καὶ ἦσαν <u>πεφυτευμένα</u> <sup>34</sup> ἐντὸς τῆς αὐλῆς παρὰ τὸ τεῖχος <u>δένδρα ὠραῖα παντοδαπὰ</u> <u>καὶ καρποφόρα</u> <sup>35</sup> πάντα. <sup>36</sup> καὶ ἦν <u>ὁ καρπὸς</u> <sup>37</sup> αὐτῶν <u>πέπειρος</u> ... <sup>38</sup>	Καὶ ἦσαν <u>πεφυτευμένα</u> [ἔσω τῆς αὐλῆς] <sup>39</sup> παρὰ τὸ τεῖχος <u>δένδρα ὠραῖα παντοδαπὰ</u> <u>καρποφόρα,</u> καὶ πᾶς <u>ὁ καρπὸς αὐτῶν πέπειρος</u> ...

<sup>32</sup> Kraemer (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 41, 117-118) makes these comparisons between Pentephres’ courtyard and the Garden of Eden but does not offer an interpretation of the function of this imagery in the narrative. So also Ronald Charles, “Une lecture narrative de *Joseph et Aséneth* à la lumière du motif de la ‘nouvelle creation’,” *Science et Esprit* 63.1 (2011), 80-81.

<sup>33</sup> I do not include variant readings which are not significant for my discussion. Verbatim shared text is underlined, and I provide in footnotes and/or in the main body all textual variants (apparent to me from Burchard’s apparatus) which affect my argument.

<sup>34</sup> The initial key word which contributes to the verdant imagery is πεφυτευμένα, which appears in witnesses from both family *b* (E Arm L2 L1) and family *d*. Variants within family *b* include καὶ ἦσαν πεφραγμένοι in F and καὶ ἦσαν πεφραγμένοι οἱ ἄνδρες μετὰ συδηροῦ in W.

<sup>35</sup> FW have a different form of the same word: καρποφοροῦντα.

<sup>36</sup> Family *d* witnesses, along with FW and L2 from family *b*, do not have the word πάντα. Manuscript E (from family *b*) has a variant which retains the Edenic imagery: δένδρα πάντερπνα παντοίας ὁπώρας κομῶντα πεπύρου. The Syriac version reads “trees of various fruits.” G lacks the mention of trees because it lacks this passage.

<sup>37</sup> Family *d* along with Arm and L1 attest to the word πᾶς before καρπός.

<sup>38</sup> The Syriac version has “ripened fruit of summer.” Of the witnesses which contain this passage (all but G and 435&, the latter siglum of which represents a collection of Latin manuscripts), only FW (which have the word ἄπειρος instead of πέπειρος) do not have the key word “ripe” here.

<sup>39</sup> Philonenko indicates that while D has ἔσω, B has the synonymous ἔνδον.

**Table 4: Jos. Asen. Bu 2:11/Ph 2:19 Translation**

Burchard 2:11 (Burchard trans.)	Philonenko 2:19 (my trans.)
And <u>handsome trees of all sorts</u> and all <u>bearing fruit</u> were planted within the court along the wall. And <u>their fruit was ripe</u> ...	And there were <u>trees</u> [inside the court] beside the wall, <u>handsome fruit trees of all sorts</u> , and all <u>their fruit was ripe</u> ...

Both the *b* and *d* family groups feature three key words and phrases which paint the scene of verdant bounty: (1) πεφυτευμένα, (2) δένδρα ώραῖα παντοδαπὰ [καὶ] καρποφόρα, and (3) ὁ καρπὸς αὐτῶν πέπειρος. Further contributing to the Eden imagery is a flowing spring (πηγή), modified variously in the manuscript tradition with phrases connoting vitality and verve: ὕδατος πλουσίου ζῶντος (FW Syr Arm 435& L1) or ὕδατος πλουσία (B Slav) (Bu 2:12/Ph 2:20).<sup>40</sup> Many witnesses round out this imagery of flourishing abundance with a river (ποταμός) which waters the trees (ἐπότιζε πάντα τὰ δένδρα; Bu 2:12/Ph 2:20).<sup>41</sup> Finally, the guards of Pentephres' courtyard (Bu 2:11/Ph 2:18) recall the cherubim whom God stations to guard Eden's tree of life in Gen 3:24.<sup>42</sup> Before Aseneth even meets Joseph, then, the reader's imagination brims with scenery resembling the biblical Garden of Eden, the setting for God's creation of the first woman.

Joseph is the first character to use overt creation language to describe God. His seemingly abrupt shirking of Aseneth's amorous advances and subsequent explanation for his rejection (Bu/Ph 8:5-6) fit within a frame of two blessings. The first, which is

<sup>40</sup> D mentions the spring without a modifier. 436 has *voluptatis aque native*. E has a paraphrase.

<sup>41</sup> The river does not appear in E, which contains a paraphrase.

<sup>42</sup> Only G lacks mention of the guards (to be expected since it lacks this entire passage).

preserved in all *b* and *d* witnesses except one (G), is a response to Aseneth’s initial greeting. Its wording is relatively stable in the manuscripts:

**Table 5: *Jos. Asen.* Bu 8:3/Ph 8:2 Text and Translation**

Burchard 8:3	Philonenko 8:2
εὐλογῇσει σε κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ ζωοποιήσας <sup>43</sup> τὰ πάντα <sup>44</sup>	εὐλογῇση σε ὁ θεὸς ὁ ζωοποιήσας <sup>45</sup> τὰ πάντα
May the Lord <u>God who gives life to all</u> (things) bless you” (Burchard trans.).	May the <u>God who gives life to all</u> bless you (my trans.).

The important verb for my purposes here is ζωοποιέω, which occurs as either an aorist participle (“who gave life”) or present participle (“who gives life”). The only alternative reading in the manuscripts is the present participle of the synonymous verb ζωογονέω – another compound built with the word “life” – in manuscript E. In all of the earliest witnesses, then, Joseph describes his God as the one who gave/gives/produces life.

Joseph’s second blessing, uttered upon recognizing Aseneth’s distress at his rebuff (Bu/Ph 8:8), is yet more descriptive. He puts his hand on Aseneth’s head and addresses his God as universal creator (Bu 8:9/Ph 8:10-11). Despite their textual variants, both textual families portray God as life-giver/creator. The following charts give Burchard’s and Philonenko’s reconstructions of Joseph’s prayer, based principally on families *b* and *d* (respectively), while the footnotes and subsequent main-body paragraphs provide interpretive comments and further information about the variants

<sup>43</sup> FW and B have the aorist participle as it appears in Burchard’s text. Some witnesses attest the same verb as a present participle (ζωοποιῶν or its translational equivalent): Arm 436 435& L1 D Slav. Manuscript E has a form of ζωογονέω instead. G is the only witness which lacks the whole passage.

<sup>44</sup> Burchard indicates that Slav has “all men.”

<sup>45</sup> Philonenko indicates that D has the present participle (-ων).

among individual manuscripts within each family of witnesses. Verbatim shared text which depicts God as life-giver/creator is underlined, while disparate text unique to each one which depicts God as life-giver/creator appears in bold. While the blessing's initial address and subsequent appeal deserve consideration together, I present the data in separate charts along with interpretive comments in order to make each one easier to read. The text of the address is as follows:

**Table 6: Jos. Asen. Bu 8:9a/Ph 8:10a Text and Translation**

Burchard 8:9a	Philonenko 8:10a
<p>Κύριε ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρὸς μου Ἰσραὴλ  ὁ ὑψιστος ὁ δυνατὸς τοῦ Ἰακώβ  <u>ὁ ζωοποιήσας<sup>46</sup> τὰ πάντα</u>  <u>καὶ καλέσας ἀπὸ τοῦ σκότους εἰς τὸ φῶς</u>  <u>καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς πλάνης εἰς τὴν ἀλήθειαν</u>  <u>καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν<sup>47</sup></u></p> <p>Lord God of my father Israel,  the Most High, the Powerful One of Jacob,  <u>who gave life to all (things)</u>  <u>and called (them) from the darkness</u>  <u>to the light,</u>  and from the error to the truth,  <u>and from the death to the life</u>  (Burchard trans.).</p>	<p>Κύριε ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρὸς μου Ἰσραὴλ  ὁ ὑψιστος, ὁ δυνατὸς,  <u>ὁ ζωοποιήσας τὰ πάντα</u>  <u>καὶ καλέσας ἀπὸ τοῦ σκότους εἰς τὸ φῶς</u>  <u>[καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς πλάνης εἰς τὴν ἀλήθειαν]<sup>48</sup></u>  <u>καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν</u></p> <p>Lord God of my father Israel  the Most High, the Powerful One,  <u>who gave life to all (things)</u>  <u>and called (them) from the darkness</u>  <u>to the light</u>  [and from the error to the truth]  <u>and from the death to the life”</u>  (adapted from Burchard trans.).</p>

<sup>46</sup> There are several different readings for this verb in the manuscripts which contain this passage (all but G; unreadable in F), but each of the verbs or verbal forms points to either God's life-giving or creating: W and family *d* have the aorist participle *ζωοποιήσας*, while E contains a present participle of the same verb (*ζωοποιῶν*). Various versions use a conjugated form: Burchard gives *qui vivificas* (or its equivalent) for Syr (Arm) L2 L1.

<sup>47</sup> Only E and G lack this line.

<sup>48</sup> Philonenko indicates that this line is not in B or D.

In both sets of earliest witnesses, Joseph addresses his God as “the one who gave life to all and called them from darkness to light.” The only significant variant for this line is a different tense for the same verb (ζωοποιῶν).<sup>49</sup> The participial phrase καὶ καλέσας ἀπὸ τοῦ σκότους εἰς τὸ φῶς, an image reminiscent of God’s creative act in Gen 1:3-4, is ubiquitous in the witnesses which contain this passage and so serves as further evidence that the earliest streams of the narrative’s transmission understand Aseneth’s transformation in light of the Genesis creation narratives. The subsequent line καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν (“and from death to life”) appears in all witnesses but one which contain this passage. Its wide inclusion further demonstrates the omnipresence of this theme in the earliest forms of the narrative: Aseneth’s transformation is the result of God’s giving her *life*. These three verbal commonalities thus demonstrate that, in *Joseph and Aseneth*, God is (1) the cosmic life-giver who (2) has called (a verb associated with creation in Gen 1:5, 8, 10) his creatures from darkness to light (reproducing an image from original creation [Gen 1:3-4]), and (3) whose creative power is explicitly represented as the giving of life.

Joseph’s adjacent appeal is well-suited to follow this address, since his requests of God draw likewise upon God’s identity as creator and giver of life. More variation among the textual witnesses exists for the appeal, and yet their basic content is markedly similar:

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<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, family *c* and PQ (from family *a*) have ποιήσας, the verb used in the first Genesis creation account to describe God’s creative act (ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεός [Gen 1:1 LXX]). The presence of both ζωοποιέω and ποιέω in the manuscript tradition in this one line mirrors the conceptual muddling of “life-giving” with “creating” that, I argue below, the broader narrative betrays.

Table 7: *Jos. Asen. Bu 8:9b/Ph 8:10b-11 Text*

Burchard 8:9b	Philonenko 8:10b-11
<p>σύ κύριε εὐλόγησον τὴν παρθένον ταύτην  <u>καὶ ἀνακαίνισον αὐτὴν τῷ πνεύματί σου</u>  <u>καὶ ἀνάπласον</u><sup>50</sup> αὐτὴν τῇ χειρί σου τῇ          &lt;κρυφαίᾳ&gt;  <u>καὶ ἀναζωοποιήσον αὐτὴν τῇ ζωῇ σου</u><sup>51</sup>  <u>καὶ φαγέτω ἄρτον ζωῆς σου</u>          καὶ πιέτω ποτήριον εὐλογίας σου          καὶ συγκαταρίθμησον αὐτὴν τῷ λαῷ σου          ὃν ἐξελέξω πρὶν γενέσθαι τὰ πάντα          καὶ εἰσελθέτω εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσίν σου          ἣν ἡτοίμασας τοῖς ἐκλεκτοῖς σου<sup>52</sup>  <u>καὶ ζησάτω ἐν τῇ αἰωνίῳ ζωῇ σου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον.</u></p>	<p>σύ αὐτὸς κύριε <b>ζωοποιήσον</b>          καὶ εὐλόγησον τὴν παρθένον          ταύτην.  <u>καὶ ἀνακαίνισον τῷ πνεύματί</u>  <u>σου</u><sup>53</sup>          καὶ πιέτω ποτήριον εὐλογίας σου,          ἣν ἐξελέξω πρὶν γενέσθαι,          καὶ εἰσελθάτω εἰς τὴν          κατάπαυσίν σου,          ἣν ἡτοίμασας τοῖς ἐκλεκτοῖς σου.</p>

<sup>50</sup> Family *c* reads *ἀναζωοποιήσον* here rather than *ἀνάπласον*, offering an example in the manuscript evidence of the interchangeability for *Joseph and Aseneth* of “making” and “making alive.”

<sup>51</sup> Some witnesses lack the first or second half of the line *καὶ ἀναζωοποιήσον αὐτὴν τῇ ζωῇ σου* or parts thereof, but only 435& and Mc lack both uses of the “life” language. Burchard’s apparatus reads: *καὶ ἀναζωοποιήσον αὐτὴν* (> F L1) *τῇ ζωῇ σου* (> W Syr 436) FW Syr Arm 436 L1; > 435& Mc.

<sup>52</sup> E lacks the passage from *καὶ ἀνάπласον* to *ἐκλεκτοῖς σου* and so, as an individual witness of family *b*, contains the least amount of life/creation imagery.

<sup>53</sup> At this point in his reconstruction, Philonenko includes in brackets lines of text not found in B or D, the witnesses he considers prior (*καὶ ἀνάπласον αὐτὴν τῇ χειρί σου [τῇ κρυφαίᾳ] καὶ ἀναζωοποιήσον αὐτὴν τῇ ζωῇ σου καὶ φαγέτω ἄρτον ζωῆς σου*). I do not include them in this chart since I am interested in the differences between the two earliest families.

Table 8: *Jos. Asen. Bu 8:9b/Ph 8:10b-11 Translation*

Burchard 8:9b (Burchard trans.)	Philonenko 8:10b-11 (my trans.)
<p>You, Lord, bless this virgin,  and <u>renew</u> her <u>by your spirit</u>,  <b>and form her anew by your hidden hand,</b>  <b>and make her alive again by your life,</b>  <b>and let her eat your bread of life,</b>  and drink your cup of blessing,  and number her among your people  that you have chosen before all (things)  came into being,  and let her enter your rest  which you have prepared for your  chosen ones,  <b>and live in your eternal life for ever (and) ever.</b></p>	<p>You yourself, Lord, <b>make alive</b>  and bless this virgin.  And <u>renew</u> (her) <u>by your spirit</u></p> <p>And let her drink your cup of  blessing,  which you elected before it came  into being,  and let her enter your rest,  which you prepared for your  elected ones.</p>

As these charts indicate, there are two main variations of Joseph's appeal to the creator God. The first, constructed from *b*-family manuscripts, contains at least one and up to five components which refer to creation and/or life:

- (1) καὶ ἀνακαίνισον αὐτὴν τῷ πνεύματί σου (cf. Gen 1:2 LXX, where God's πνεῦμα populates the formless void).
- (2) καὶ ἀνάπλασον αὐτήν (which invokes a compound form of the verb used in Gen 2:7 LXX to describe God's creation of a human [καὶ ἔπλασεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον]).
- (3) καὶ ἀναζωοποιήσον αὐτήν
- (4) τῇ ζωῇ σου
- (5) καὶ φαγέτω ἄρτον ζωῆς σου

Even without ἀνάπλασον, ἀναζωοποιήσον, τῇ ζωῇ, ἄρτον ζωῆς, and ζησάτω ἐν τῇ αἰωνίῳ ζωῇ σου, the second version of the appeal, attested by family *d* witnesses, also focuses attention on God's ability to (re)create and give life.<sup>54</sup> This form begins with a use of the

<sup>54</sup> While Philonenko has chosen to include all three of the ἀνα- verbal phrases in his reconstruction, neither B nor D contains the second two (ἀνάπλασον αὐτήν or ἀναζωοποιήσον αὐτήν), so I ignore those lines when considering the attestation of family *d*.



verb ζωοποιέω with no counterpart in the family *b* version. Then, like the other version, this prayer invokes God’s πνεῦμα (cf. Gen 1:2 LXX) as the means of Aseneth’s renewal. Across both families of the earliest witnesses, then, Joseph asks the creator God to make Aseneth alive (again) by God’s spirit, a theme which many witnesses supplement with additional creation language.

Another allusion to God as creator occurs soon afterward as Joseph prepares to leave his host’s house. Pentephres reasonably recommends that his guest spend the night (Bu/Ph 9:4), but Joseph insists that he cannot do it; he must leave today (Bu/Ph 9:5):

**Table 9: *Jos. Asen.* Bu/Ph 9:5 Text and Translation**

Burchard 9:5	Philonenko 9:5
οὐχὶ ἀλλ’ ἀπελεύσομαι σήμερον διότι αὕτη ἡ ἡμέρα ἐστὶν ἐν ᾗ ἤρξατο ὁ θεὸς <b>ποιεῖν</b> <b>πάντα τὰ κτίσματα αὐτοῦ</b> <sup>55</sup> καὶ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ὀγδόῃ <sup>56</sup> ὅταν ἐπαναστρέψω καὶ γὰρ ὑμᾶς καὶ αὐλισθήσομαι ἐνθάδε	οὐχὶ, ἀλλ’ ἀπελεύσομαι σήμερον, διότι ἐστὶν ἡ ἡμέρα ἐν ᾗ ἤρξατο ὁ θεὸς <b>ποιῆσαι</b> <sup>57</sup> <b>τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ,</b> καὶ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ὀγδόῃ ἐπαναστρέφω καὶ γὰρ πάλιν πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ αὐλισθήσομαι ἐνθάδε
No, but I will go out today, because this is <u>the day on which God began to make</u> <b>all his creatures,</b> and on the eighth day, I too will return to you and lodge here” (adapted from Burchard trans.).	No, but I will go out today, for it is <u>the day on which God began to make</u> <b>his works,</b> and on the eighth day I will return again to you and lodge here” (adapted from Burchard trans.).

<sup>55</sup> There are several variations for πάντα τὰ κτίσματα αὐτοῦ, though none change the basic meaning. Burchard’s apparatus indicates: πάντα τὰ κτίσματα αὐτοῦ E FW Arm; *omnem creaturam suam* (>435&) L2 L1. The Syriac has “This is the first day, in which God began to make everything on the face of the earth.”

<sup>56</sup> Some witnesses (E FW Arm [except for 332]) have “the seventh (ἐβδόμη) day.”

<sup>57</sup> Philonenko indicates that while D and E have ποιῆσαι, B and F have ποιεῖν.

Joseph's explanation has nothing to do with travel logistics or personal responsibilities. He gives a theological, rather than practical, reason for his plans: "I will go out today, because this is the day [or: it is the day] on which God began to make all his creatures [or: his works]" (Bu/Ph 9:5). Joseph goes on to say that he will return on the eighth day, when "this day" returns (Bu/Ph 9:5). The reader is not treated to Pentephres' reaction to Joseph's reply, but one might guess that Joseph's rationale would strike his host, an Egyptian priest, as perplexing. The reader, on the other hand, receives a clue from the narrator which illumines Joseph's seemingly peculiar logic.

Immediately after Joseph leaves, the reader learns that Aseneth begins to repent of her idol worship (Bu 10:1/Ph 10:2). She does so for the next *seven days* (Bu 10:17/Ph 10:19), which culminate in her transformation (Bu 11:1-17:10/Ph 11:1-17:7). Joseph's reference to God as creator and to the next seven days as mirroring God's creation process gives the reader a lens through which to understand the next seven days in the narrative, the days of Aseneth's repentance. Just as God began to make creation on this day, God will begin to remake Aseneth on this day. Just as God's original creation took seven days, Aseneth's re-creation event spans seven days. Joseph's departing reference to God as creator serves, then, to foreshadow for the reader Aseneth's transformation, which is cast as her re-creation (cf. Bu 15:4-5/Ph 15:3-4, examined below).<sup>58</sup>

During these seven days, when a humbled and distraught Aseneth finally brings herself to pray, she addresses Joseph's God primarily as creator. Both families of the earliest textual traditions include creation imagery and language in Aseneth's prayer.

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Hubbard's similar suggestion (*New Creation*, 64-65). He concludes that the author "parallel[s] God's first creative act with his new creative act (conversion) making the former a metaphor for the latter."

Some is shared verbatim (underlined), while some belongs uniquely to either *b* or *d* (bolded):

**Table 10: Jos. Asen. Bu 12:1-2/Ph 12:2-3 Text and Translation**

Burchard 12:1-2	Philonenko 12:2-3
<p>Κύριε ὁ θεὸς τῶν αἰώνων  <b>ὁ κτίσας τὰ πάντα</b><sup>59</sup> <b>καὶ ζωοποιήσας</b><sup>60</sup>  <u>ὁ δοὺς</u><sup>61</sup> <u>πνοὴν ζωῆς</u><sup>62</sup> <b>πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει σου</b><sup>63</sup>  <u>ὁ ἐξενέγκας τὰ ἀόρατα εἰς τὸ φῶς</u><sup>64</sup>  <u>ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ὄντα καὶ τὰ φαινόμενα ἐκ τῶν</u>  <u>ἀφανῶν καὶ μὴ ὄντων</u><sup>65</sup>  <u>ὁ ὑψώσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ θεμελιώσας αὐτὸν</u>  <u>ἐν στερεώματι</u><sup>66</sup> <u>ἐπὶ τὸν νῶτον τῶν</u>  <u>ἀνέμων</u>  <u>ὁ θεμελιώσας τὴν γῆν ἐπὶ τῶν ὑδάτων</u><sup>67</sup>  <u>ὁ θείς λίθους μεγάλους ἐπὶ τῆς ἀβύσσου τοῦ</u></p>	<p>Κύριε ὁ θεὸς τῶν αἰώνων  <u>ὁ δοὺς</u> <b>πᾶσι</b> <u>πνοὴν ζωῆς,</u>  <u>ὁ ἐξενέγκας τὰ ἀόρατα εἰς τὸ φῶς,</u>  <u>ὁ ποιήσας τὰ πάντα καὶ φανερώσας τὰ</u>  <u>ἀφανῆ,</u>  <u>ὁ ὑψώσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ</u>    <u>θεμελιώσας τὴν γῆν ἐπὶ τῶν ὑδάτων</u>  <u>ὁ πήξας τοὺς λίθους τοὺς μεγάλους ἐπὶ τῆς</u></p>

<sup>59</sup> Some witnesses (G [436]) have ὁ κτίσας τοὺς αἰῶνας.

<sup>60</sup> Manuscript G has ποιήσας instead of ζωοποιήσας. Some witnesses (F[W] G Syr) support a reading with τὰ πάντα after ζωοποιήσας. This line is not in E or family *d*.

<sup>61</sup> 435& has *et dedisti*, while 436 does not have an equivalent of ὁ δοὺς.

<sup>62</sup> G lacks πνοήν. 436 has *alitum*, while 435& has *alimentum*. In the place of ζωῆς, G has a variant which still invokes the “life” motif: πρὸς ζωήν. Only E lacks ζωῆς altogether.

<sup>63</sup> FW and the Syriac version lack this line. Family *d* witnesses indicate that God gave to all either (1) πνοὴν ζωῆς (B and Slav) or πνοὴν καὶ ζωήν (D).

<sup>64</sup> All variant readings for this line include the mention of light. Burchard indicates that the Latin witnesses have the following: L2 = *qui eduxisti (+ credentes in te de tenebris ad [in?] 435&) lucem (invisibile lumen 436)*. The Syriac version reads “he who is not seen has caused the light to appear and to go away.” Some witnesses (FW G D) have “visible” (ὁρατά) rather than “invisible.” Presumably, this means that God has created everything which is visible.

<sup>65</sup> All variant readings for this line include verbs which reference God’s *making*. The Syriac version has “he who made beings from nothing.” Witness E has ὁ ποιήσας τὰ πάντα ἐκ μὴ ὄντων. The witnesses of 435& have *qui fecisti omnia*. As indicated above, family *d* has ὁ ποιήσας τὰ πάντα καὶ φανερώσας τὰ ἀφανῆ.

<sup>66</sup> G reads ἐν τῷ μεγάλῳ στερεώματι. Arm and L1 lack ἐν στερεώματι. Some witnesses have only ὁ ὑψώσας τὸν οὐρανὸν and not the rest of this line (E 436 *d*).

<sup>67</sup> Some witnesses have an additional mention of the (big) stones at the end of this line (F Arm L2).

<p><u>ὑδατος</u><sup>68</sup></p> <p>Lord God of the ages,  <b>who created all (things) and gave life (to them),</b>  <u>who gave breath of life to your whole creation,</u>  <u>who brought the invisible (things) out into the light,</u>  <u>who made</u> the (things that) are and the (ones that) have an appearance from the non-appearing and non-being,  <u>who lifted up the heaven</u>  and <b>founded it on a firmament</b> upon the back of the winds,  <u>who founded the earth upon the waters,</u>  <u>who put big stones on the abyss of the water...</u>" (Burchard trans.).</p>	<p><u>ἀβύσσου τοῦ ὑδατος</u></p> <p>Lord God of the ages,    <u>who gave breath of life to all,</u>    <u>who brought the invisible (things) out into the light,</u>  <u>who made</u> all (things) and made visible the non-appearing,    <u>who lifted up the heaven</u> and    <u>founded the earth upon the waters</u>  <u>who fixed the great stones on the abyss of the water...</u>" (my trans.).</p>
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At a bare minimum, the earliest textual witnesses share the idea that God gave (ὁ δούς) “breath of life” (πνοὴν ζωῆς) or simply “breath” or “life” to “all” (πάσῃ or πᾶσι). God is thus represented as universal creator in both streams of textual transmission. Some witnesses further specify the object of this divine gift as “all his creatures” (πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει σου). Witnesses belonging to family *b* include the additional participles κτίσας and ζωοποιήσας (or ποιήσας), marking God once more as both creator and life-giver/maker.

Both textual families then refer to God’s creative act of calling (invisible) things “into the light” (cf. Gen. 1:3), God’s making (ὁ ποιήσας or its translational equivalent), and God’s raising and founding the heavens (τὸν οὐρανόν). The phrase “the earth upon

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<sup>68</sup> Manuscript E has the only major variant reading, which is an alternate image of God’s creation: ὁ πεδήσας τὴν θάλασσαν ψάμμω καὶ πάντα σταθμῶν στερεώσας. See Philonenko’s text in the chart above for BD.

the waters” (τὴν γῆν ἐπὶ τῶν ὑδάτων), which draws language from Gen 1:10 LXX, is common to both textual families, and witnesses belonging to families *b* and *d* employ Genesis creation narrative vocabulary to depict the “abyss of the water” (τῆς ἀβύσσου τοῦ ὕδατος [cf. Gen 1:2, 6-7, 9-10 LXX]). Some witnesses also mention the firmament (ἐν στερεώματι [cf. Gen 1:6-8 LXX]). This passage thus depicts God as creator with the language of the Septuagintal Genesis creation narratives: οὐρανόν (Gen 1:1, 8), ἀβύσσου (Gen 1:2), ἀόρατα (Gen 1:3), φῶς (Gen 1:3), στερεώματι (Gen 1:6-8), ὕδατος (Gen 1:6-7, 9-10), γῆν (Gen 1:10-12), and πνοὴν ζωῆς (Gen 2:7). Finally, in some family *b* witnesses, Aseneth closes her depiction of a generative God with an echo of the *means* of creation in Genesis 1, couched in “life” language:

**Table 11: Jos. Asen. Bu 12:2 Text and Translation**

Burchard 12:2	Burchard trans.
ὅτι σὺ κύριε ἐλάλησας <sup>69</sup> καὶ ἐζωογονήθησαν <sup>70</sup> ὅτι ὁ λόγος σου κύριε ζωὴ ἐστι πάντων τῶν κτισμάτων σου. <sup>71</sup>	For you, Lord, <b>spoke and they were brought to life</b> , because your word, Lord, is <b>life</b> for all <b>your creatures</b> .

God is thus also conceived as the sustainer of life for living beings. In sum, for Aseneth, in both of her earliest textual articulations, the God of Joseph is the universal creator.

<sup>69</sup> FW and G have ἐλάλησας here while 435& and L1 make no reference to God’s speaking. These two lines do not appear at all in E or Arm.

<sup>70</sup> Some witnesses (F[W] [G]) have καὶ πάντα ἐζωογονήθησαν. Other witnesses which attest to the notion of “all” have variant readings: Syr has “and everything came into being”; 435& has *quia domine cuncta vivificasti*; 436 has *et vivificate sunt*; L1 has *sicut viventes*.

<sup>71</sup> G lacks the final reference to creatures (πάντων τῶν κτισμάτων σου). Syr has “your living and all-creating word.”

The divine response to Aseneth's prayer is an angelic visitor whose presence confirms the heroine's movement from death to life. In the earliest witnesses, the angelic man communicates most basically that her prayer has been answered: she has been re-created. In Bu 15.5/Ph 15.4, textual witnesses in families *b* and *d* have at least one verb which denotes Aseneth's being "renewed" (ἀνακαινισθήση), "formed anew" (ἀναπλασθήση [again, cf. Gen 2:7]) and/or "made alive (again)" (ἀναζωοποιηθήση or ζωοποιηθήση).<sup>72</sup> Evoking the metaphors of consumption in Bu/Ph 8:5, he tells her that she has eaten "(blessed) bread of life" (ἄρτον εὐλογημένον ζωῆς [E G Arm] or ἄρτον ζωῆς [family *d*]).<sup>73</sup> Family *d* witnesses indicate that Aseneth has drunk a "cup of imperishability" (ποτήριον τῆς ἀφθαρσίας),<sup>74</sup> while family *b* witnesses have "blessed cup of immortality" (ποτήριον εὐλογημένον ἀθανασίας [Arm 436]), or "cup of immortality" (ποτήριον ἀθανασίας [E FW L1]), or simply "blessed cup" (ποτήριον εὐλογημένον [G]).<sup>75</sup> The reversal of these consumption metaphors from their boundary-drawing function in 8:5 confirms that transformed Aseneth is no longer out of bounds.

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<sup>72</sup> Some of the Armenian manuscripts have the first two verbs and not the third, while others attest only the first and third. FW also have the first and third but contain variant forms of the third (F: ζωοποιηθήση; W: ζωοποιήσει). E and G only have the first verb. The *d* family witnesses all attest the first and third (though D has ζωοποιηθήση without the prefix). L1 has *renovate es et vivificata es*. This passage is lost in the Syriac and does not appear in 435&.

<sup>73</sup> FW have εὐλογημένον without ζωῆς. Likewise, 436 and L1 have only *benedictionis*. This passage is lost in the Syriac and does not appear in 435&.

<sup>74</sup> B has an additional appearance of "life" language here: ζωῆς ἀφθάρτου.

<sup>75</sup> A few family *b* witnesses (L1 436 Arm G) complete the triad with mention of an ointment "of imperishability" (cf. 8:5).

Symbolic consumption turns to actual consumption as the angelic man has Aseneth eat a honeycomb. The meaning of this mystical encounter and the symbolism of the comb have generated a great deal of debate among scholars.<sup>76</sup> For my argument, the most important feature of this section is its creation language and imagery. The Genesis creation story's Garden of Eden (which the LXX translates with *παράδεισος* [Gen 2:8, 15], sometimes accompanied by the modifier *τῆς τρυφῆς* [Gen 3:23, 24]) receives explicit reference in both of the earliest streams of textual tradition, between one and four times. The first instance is common to both family *b* and family *d*.<sup>77</sup> Aseneth's divine visitor mentions the garden while describing the honeycomb's mystical provenance. It was made by the "bees of the paradise of delight," an Eden reference common to both families of witnesses:

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<sup>76</sup> See, in particular, Anthea E. Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis: Interpreting Aseneth's Honeycomb," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 14.2 (2005), 133-57.

<sup>77</sup> All family *d* witnesses attest "paradise" here, and all but two *b*-family witnesses which contain this passage attest to this instance of "paradise": G Arm 435& L1. It is not found in E or 436. The Syriac version makes explicit that the paradise is Eden: "a swarm of the bees of God's paradise, which [is] the living Eden."

Table 12: *Jos. Asen. Bu 16:14/Ph 16:8 Text*

Burchard 16:14	Philonenko 16:8
διότι τοῦτο τὸ κηρίον ἐστὶ πνεῦμα ζωῆς. <sup>78</sup> καὶ <sup>79</sup> τοῦτο πεποιήκασιν αἱ μέλισσαι τοῦ παραδείσου <sup>80</sup> τῆς τρυφῆς ἐκ τῆς δρόσου τῶν ῥόδων τῆς ζωῆς <sup>81</sup> τῶν ὄντων ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ. <sup>82</sup>	διότι τὸ μέλι τοῦτο πεποιήκασιν αἱ μέλισσαι τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς <sup>83</sup>

Table 13: *Jos. Asen. Bu 16:14/Ph 16:8 Translation*

Burchard 16:14 (Burchard trans.)	Philonenko 16:8 (my trans.)
For this comb is (full of the) <b>spirit of life</b> . And the bees of <u>the paradise of delight</u> have made this from the dew of the <b>roses</b> <b>of life</b> that are <b>in the paradise of God</b> .	For the bees of <u>the paradise of delight</u> made this honey.

Family *b* witnesses use this Eden reference as an opportunity to develop further the “life” motif, as the bolded text in the above chart illustrates. Contributing even further to the

<sup>78</sup> The phrase πνεῦμα ζωῆς or its equivalent is attested by G Syr Arm. It does not appear in E L1 F W *d*. Language of “life” is also attested here by L2 (*favus vite*) and 435& (*favus vite eterne*).

<sup>79</sup> E and L1 do not have διότι τοῦτο τὸ κηρίον ἐστὶ πνεῦμα ζωῆς καί. F and W lack this line because they do not have the larger context.

<sup>80</sup> Burchard indicates that the additional qualifier τοῦ θεοῦ may belong in the text after τοῦ παραδείσου since Syr Arm (L2) and L1 attest to some form of “God” here.

<sup>81</sup> G and family *d* do not have the second mention of paradise since they do not attest the words from ἐκ τῆς δρόσου through τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ. L1 lacks τῆς ζωῆς. One *b*-family manuscript contains a variant reading without mention of “life” (E: ἐκ τῶν ἀνθέων). The witnesses represented by 435& attest a variant which does mention “life”: *sumentes rosas et omnes flores vite*.

<sup>82</sup> There are several minor variant readings for the phrase τῶν ὄντων ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ, most of which contain the reference to paradise: τοῦ παραδείσου τοῦ θεοῦ (E); *in paradiso* (L1); “which is in paradise” (Syr). 436 has either *pomerio* or *pomario* instead.

<sup>83</sup> Philonenko indicates that the Slavonic attests “food” rather than “delight.”



interspersed “life” language, the honeycomb is called a “comb of life” (κηρίον ζωῆς) in the next sentence of some witnesses.<sup>84</sup>

Most family *b* witnesses contain an additional passage just subsequently which is permeated with language and imagery of “life” and which mentions paradise again. The pertinent phrases appear in bold in the following chart, with relevant variants in the footnotes:

**Table 14: *Jos. Asen. Bu 16:16* Text and Translation**

Burchard 16:16	Burchard trans.
<p>ἰδοὺ δὴ ἔφαγες <b>ἄρτον ζωῆς</b> καὶ ἔπιες  ποτήριον ἀθανασίας καὶ κέχρισαι χρίσματι  ἀφαρσίας. ἰδοὺ δὴ ἀπὸ τῆς σήμερον αἱ  σάρκες σου βρύουσιν <b>ὡς ἄνθη ζωῆς</b><sup>85</sup> ἀπὸ τῆς  γῆς τοῦ ὑψίστου καὶ τὰ ὀστέα σου  πιανθήσονται<sup>86</sup> ὡς αἱ κέδροι <b>τοῦ παραδείσου</b>  <b>τῆς τρυφῆς</b> τοῦ θεοῦ...<sup>87</sup></p>	<p>Behold, you have eaten <b>bread of life</b>, and  drunk a cup of immortality, and been  anointed with ointment of incorruptibility.  Behold, from today your flesh (will)  flourish <b>like flowers of life</b> from the  ground of the Most High, and your bones  will grow strong like the cedars of the  <b>paradise of delight</b> of God...</p>

Thus, after Aseneth has eaten from the comb, the angel employs the phrase “bread of life” once again in a series of metaphorical genitival descriptors which, as in Bu 15:5/Ph 15:4, point to Aseneth’s new status as a beneficiary of God’s gift of life and as the

<sup>84</sup> This description of the honeycomb occurs in E (Syr) Arm; 436 has *et favus vite est*; G has τὸ κηρίον ὡς προεῖπον ζωῆς.

<sup>85</sup> G has ἄνθος ζωῆς. Some witnesses do not contain this passage at all: E, F, W, L1 (and of course the family *d* witnesses).

<sup>86</sup> Burchard’s apparatus indicates that while (Syr) Arm L2 have this verb (the equivalent of *πιανθήσονται*), G has ἀνθήσονται and L1 has *sanabuntur*.

<sup>87</sup> According to Burchard’s apparatus, this mention of Eden appears in G Arm L2 Syr. The Syriac version has “paradise” rather than the longer “of the paradise of delight of God.” G does not have τοῦ θεοῦ after the mention of paradise. There is some variation in the Latin witnesses in description of God here, though they all apparently contain the reference to paradise. The Latin manuscripts of 435& have the adjective *omnipotentis* after “God.” 436 has *et sapientie domini dei altissimi*.

creature whom God has formed anew. Her body now bears the mark of her (re)creation, as her very flesh (σάρκες σου) and bones (ὀστᾶ σου) become, like the garden in Genesis 1-2 LXX, full of life. Her form has become so beautiful that, in some witnesses (FW Arm 436 Syr), she marvels at her own transformed reflection in Edenic terms: “the hair of her head (was) like a vine in the paradise of God (παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ) prospering in its fruits” (Bu 18:9; Burchard trans.).<sup>88</sup>

It is no wonder that the act of eating the honeycomb results in such splendor, for the comb and its honey are described as either “breath of life” (Burchard 16:8: καὶ ἡ πνοὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς πνοὴ ζωῆς [cf. 16:14, treated above]), once again recalling God’s breathing life into Adam in Gen 2:7 LXX, or “scent of life” (Ph 16:4: καὶ ἡ πνοὴ αὐτοῦ ὁσμὴ ζωῆς).<sup>89</sup> This is the very honeycomb whose genesis mirrors that of original creation, as Aseneth indicates to the angelic man: σὺ ἐλάλησας<sup>90</sup> καὶ γέγονε (Bu 16:11) or ὡς εἶπας γέγονε (Ph 16:6). It, too, was spoken into being.

Finally, both of the earliest textual traditions represent post-theophany Aseneth in terms of “life”: the angelic man tells Aseneth that her name has been written in the

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<sup>88</sup> The Armenian version has the equivalent of τῷ παραδείσῳ without the genitive qualifier τοῦ θεοῦ. The Syriac version has “like a vine of God’s paradise.”

<sup>89</sup> The word ζωῆς (or its equivalent) in reference to the honeycomb is well-attested in both of the earliest streams of textual tradition: F Arm Syr 436 435& (671) and all family *d* witnesses. The only witnesses in Burchard’s apparatus which do not have mention of “life” at this point are E (which has εὐωδίας πνέων instead of ὡς πνοὴ ζωῆς) and L1 (which has *dulcis*). This passage is not found in W or G. The major disagreement in the textual tradition surrounds whether the breath/spirit of the honey is “like breath/spirit” of life (so Burchard, following Arm 436 435& [671]) or has a “scent” of life (so Philonenko, following *d* and Syr). Both readings are consistent with my argument here.

<sup>90</sup> There are slight variations in the textual tradition for the verb here, though all witnesses but one (421 [*dedisti*]) which contain this passage have a synonym for “spoke”: ἐλάλησας (FW 671); *dixisti* or its equivalent (Syr Arm [436] L1); εἶπας (B D).

heavenly “book of the living” (ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ τῶν ζώντων; Bu 15:4) or “book of life” (ἐν βίβλῳ ζωῆς; Ph 15:3).<sup>91</sup> In the Syriac and Armenian versions and in Latin 436, Joseph says that Aseneth has “walls of life.” In some family *b* witnesses, furthermore, when Aseneth looks at her post-theophany reflection, she sees that her lips look like “a rose of life” (ὡς ῥόδον ζωῆς; Bu 18:9).<sup>92</sup> Aseneth’s hands are sometimes described as “hands of life” (F Arm? Syr L1; Bu 20:5).<sup>93</sup> Many family *b* witnesses also note that when Aseneth’s family sees how beautiful she is, they “gave glory to God who gives life to the dead” (τῷ θεῷ τῷ ζωοποιοῦντι τοὺς νεκρούς), implying that this is what has happened to Aseneth (Bu 20:7).<sup>94</sup> After her repentance and transformation, Aseneth is unambiguously represented as having been given new life. The theme is more developed in the family *b* witnesses, but it is common to both of the earliest textual traditions. This imagery may therefore be considered foundational to the narrative of *Joseph and Aseneth* in all of its forms. In Ahearne-Kroll’s terms (adapted from Thomas), it is part of the fabula of the *Joseph and Aseneth* tradition.

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<sup>91</sup> The phrase is attested as “of the living” in E W G Arm 436 L1 and as “of life” in 435& (671) (661) and family *d*. It is illegible in F and destroyed in Syr. The additional qualifying phrase “in heaven” (ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) occurs in E (W) G Arm L2 (671).

<sup>92</sup> There are several variants in the manuscript tradition for the phrase “rose of life.” FW, 436, and 435& attest ῥόδον ζωῆς (or its translational equivalent). The Armenian version has the adjective “flourishing” in the place of “of life.” The other witnesses lack this phrase.

<sup>93</sup> The group of manuscripts represented by 435& mentions the “garden of life” here.

<sup>94</sup> This occurrence of ζωοποιέω (or its equivalent) appears in FW (Syr) Arm 436 (671). In the Armenian version, God is said to give life to “everything” rather than to “the dead.” The whole sentence is not found in G and L1, and some witnesses have only “God” without any form of ζωοποιέω or its equivalent (435& E *d* [Philonenko’s text has τὸν θεὸν here]).

In sum, Aseneth's transformation, in both of the earliest forms of *Joseph and Aseneth* available, is developed through a lens of the biblical category of creation and is saturated with forms of ζάω/ζωή. *Joseph and Aseneth* thus collapses the notion of God's (re)creating with God's giving of life. While one might expect the "life" motif to come from the Genesis creation narratives because it seems natural to describe God's creative activity in terms of bestowing life, the heavy exercise of the verb ζάω and its cognate noun is in reality an augmentation. This verb and its cognates occur only six times in Genesis 1-2 LXX (1:20, 24, 30; 2:7 [2x], 19). The verb ζωοποιέω ("to give life") does not appear at all.<sup>95</sup> Language of "life" (ζάω/ζωή) occurs with a great deal more frequency in the part of Genesis from which *Joseph and Aseneth* takes its characters: the Joseph cycle in chapters 37-50. It occurs with such frequency, in fact, that I suggest that *Joseph and Aseneth* is using creation language to push further a theme that is at the heart of Genesis' story about Joseph: the provision of life to non-Israelites.

The preservation of life is a recurring theme in Joseph's tale in Genesis. As Walter Brueggemann remarks, the narrative "focuses on Joseph as life-bringer," since the patriarch's "whole mission is the creation and maintenance of life."<sup>96</sup> The most poignant example is Joseph's pithy consolation of his anxious brothers, who long ago sold him into slavery and who now stand before him in supplication, in desperate need of food.

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<sup>95</sup> This verb is only used of God four times in the entire LXX: 2 Kgs 5:7; Neh 9:6; Ps 71:20; Job 36:6 [with μῆ]. It appears in the earliest witnesses of *Joseph and Aseneth* either two (family *d*) or four (family *b*) times (Bu/Ph 8:9a [*b* and *d*]; Bu 8:9b/Ph 8:10b-11 [*b* and *d*]; Bu 12:1-2/Ph 12:2-3 [*b* only]; Bu 20:7 [*b* only]).

<sup>96</sup> Walter Brueggemann, "Life and Death in Tenth Century Israel," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40.1 (1972), 100, 101.

Having just revealed his true identity to his brothers, Joseph tells them not to be distressed about their malevolent treatment of him in the past on the grounds that God had planned this all along in order to give *life* to the remnant of Israel: “[A]nd now do not grieve nor let it appear hard to you that you sold me here, for God sent me before you *for life* (εἰς γὰρ ζώην)” (Gen 45:5).<sup>97</sup>

In addition to this climactic moment, ζάω and its cognates occur repeatedly in the context of a variety of characters’ concerns about being and staying alive. In 42:2, Jacob tells his sons to go to Egypt for food “so that we may live and not die” (ἵνα ζῶμεν καὶ μὴ ἀποθάνωμεν). In 42:18, a mischievous Joseph tests his brothers, introducing his instructions with the claim that he knows what they must do in order to live: “[D]o this and you shall live (ζήσεσθε).”<sup>98</sup> In 43:8, once Joseph’s brothers have returned from Egypt the first time, Judah urges Jacob to allow him to take Benjamin to Egypt “so that we may live and not die” (ἵνα ζῶμεν καὶ μὴ ἀποθάνωμεν). In 43:27-28, Joseph inquires of his brothers if their father is still alive (ζῇ), and they answer that he indeed still lives (ζῇ). Joseph asks once more whether Jacob is alive (ζῇ) just after he discloses his identity to his brothers (45:3). Once the brothers return from Egypt the second time, they report to Jacob that Joseph is still alive (ὁ υἱός σου Ἰωσήφ ζῇ), and Jacob responds that he himself must go to Egypt because Joseph is alive (ὁ υἱός μου ζῇ) (45:26-28). When Jacob finally

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<sup>97</sup> Verse 7 makes it clear that Joseph here refers to preserving the remnant of Israel: ὑπολείπεσθαι ὑμῶν κατάλειμμα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (cf. 50:19-21).

<sup>98</sup> Brueggemann is right that in this verse, “the narrative presents Joseph as having power to turn prison to freedom, death to life” (“Life and Death,” 101). Yet I would emphasize that Joseph is explicitly the mediator of life on behalf of *God* (Gen 45:5), a point which Brueggemann acknowledges but plays down (“Life and Death,” 103).

sees Joseph, he tells his son that he can now die happily because Joseph lives (σὺ ζῇς) (46:30).

Then the “life” language takes a turn. After ten occurrences of some form of ζάω in reference to Israelite life/lives, the life/death dichotomy comes to characterize the plight of non-Israelites. Starving *Egyptians* appeal to Joseph to help them “so that we may sow and live and not die” (ἵνα σπείρωμεν καὶ ζῶμεν καὶ μὴ ἀποθάνωμεν; 47:19). Joseph, whom *God* has brought to Egypt “for life” (εἰς γὰρ ζωὴν [45:4]), accedes to their request and, in the end, becomes the preserver of life for Israelite and Egyptian alike.<sup>99</sup>

*Joseph and Aseneth* employs creation language from Genesis 1-2 LXX in combination with ζάω and its cognates to push further this motif of God’s provision of life to an Egyptian (in this case, Aseneth).<sup>100</sup> The narrative portrays the God of Israel as the creator of *all* who may offer life to all. In Bu 8:3/Ph 8:2, God is the one who gives life “to all things” (τὰ πάντα; cf. Gen 1:31). In Bu 8:9a/Ph 8:10, God is said to have given life “to all things” (τὰ πάντα). In 9:5 in the *b* family of witnesses, God made “all his creatures” (πάντα τὰ κτίσματα αὐτοῦ). In Bu 12:1/Ph 12:2, God gave “breath of life” either to “all of [his] creation” (family *b*: πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει σου) or simply to “all” (family *d*: πᾶσι). Family *b* witnesses also say that God “created all things (τὰ πάντα) and gave them

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<sup>99</sup> As Brueggemann summarizes, “Joseph is life-bringer, using his power to bring life to Pharaoh, Egypt, and all the hungry world, as well as to his brothers, the chosen people” (Life and Death, 108). With a different emphasis, my analysis has pointed to the narrative’s move not from life for the world to life for the chosen people, but the reverse: from life for Israel to life for the “other.”

<sup>100</sup> Mark G. Brett has argued that the Persian-period editors of Genesis shaped their material in such a way as to resist the dominant ethnocentric politics represented in Ezra-Nehemiah (*Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* [London and New York: Routledge, 2000]). If this is the case, *Joseph and Aseneth* extends ideas already present (even if covertly so) in the received form of Genesis.

life” and that his word is “life” for “all [God’s] creatures” (πάντων τῶν κτισμάτων σου; Bu 12:1-2). The logic is captured explicitly in Joseph’s blessing in Bu/Ph 8:9 and in Aseneth’s prayer in chapter 12, in which their address of God as creator (giver of life) anticipates their appeal for God to give life, to re-create: *since* the God of Israel is able to create all things, God is also able to re-create all things. In this case, God can re-create a repentant Egyptian, who may now enjoy the benefits reserved for those who worship YHWH. Israel’s God in *Joseph and Aseneth* is, by virtue of inhabiting the position of creator of all, the one who may give life to all, including a (repentant) non-Israelite.

We may now bring together the two fundamental attributes of God which I have shown belong to the earliest textual expressions of *Joseph and Aseneth* and are therefore foundational to its narrative core: the God of Israel is “(the) living God” and universal *creator* who, having given life to original creation, now gives life to those who worship Israel’s God.<sup>101</sup> This portrayal of the “living God” as creator and giver of life to a non-Israelite redeploys the strand of “living God” terminology in Israel’s scriptures (which I traced in Chapter One) in which the epithet functions as a boundary marker between YHWH/Israel, on the one hand, and non-Israelites, on the other. In *Joseph and Aseneth*, Aseneth the Egyptian receives life from Israel’s “living God.”

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<sup>101</sup> While I have reached this conclusion on different grounds, my formulation of the theology of “the living God” in *Joseph and Aseneth* here is similar to Goodwin’s synthetic claim about the epithet in Hellenistic Judaism. He says that “the superior character of the living God for Hellenistic Jews is rooted in his identity as the creator, who made the world, gave life, and continues to give life in sustaining creation...The living God is no longer simply the maker of Israel, the source of life for those within the covenant. The living God is also the creator of all people, Jew and Gentile alike” (*Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 67-68). In my judgment, this is true only of *Joseph and Aseneth*. Goodwin’s synthesis therefore misses what is distinctive about the narrative at hand.

## **New Life, New Family: Aseneth's Transformed Kinship Ties**

Aseneth is not unique, of course, in her status as a gentile character who is able to avoid destruction in the face of Israel's "living God." Artaxerxes does so in Esther (OG), as does Ptolemy Philopator in 3 Maccabees, Darius in Daniel (OG), and Cyrus in Daniel (TH). Yet, unlike these monarchs, Aseneth unambiguously abandons her worship of idols in favor of exclusive worship of Israel's God. She goes beyond these characters' recognition of the power of "the living God"; she turns to this God in repentance, hoping for the mercy of which she has heard, and she is explicitly granted new life. Aseneth's conversion, moreover, results in her incorporation into the people of God, into Israel. In the *b*-family version of Joseph's prayer for Aseneth in Bu 8:9/Ph 8:10-11, he asks God to "number her among your people that you have chosen before all (things) came into being" (Burchard trans.), which is considered a corollary of God's making her alive again. While the *d* family of witnesses does not have this line with its covenantal overtones, it does, along with the *b* witnesses, portray Aseneth's incorporation into Israel. In both families of earliest witnesses, Aseneth's receipt of new life entails a new family as she is transformed from daughter of Pentephres the Egyptian priest to bride of Joseph and daughter of Joseph's God.

The language of the narrative is telling. Before her conversion, Aseneth is principally identified as the "daughter" of Pentephres. When the reader initially encounters Aseneth in the narrative, she is introduced not by name, but by her familial ties. She is the daughter of Pentephres the priest of Heliopolis: θυγάτηρ τῷ Πεντεφρῇ



(Bu/Ph 1:3-4).<sup>102</sup> Aseneth is quickly identified by this kinship relationship twice more: by Pharaoh's son in Bu 1:7/Ph 1:12 (Ἀσενέθ τὴν θυγατέρα Πεντεφρῆ τοῦ ἱερέως Ἑλίουπόλεως) and by the narrator in Bu 4:3/Ph 4:5 (εἶπε Πεντεφρῆς τῇ θυγατρὶ αὐτοῦ).<sup>103</sup> When Pentephres addresses Aseneth, furthermore, he explicitly marks her as his child.<sup>104</sup> When Pentephres describes Aseneth to Joseph, he begins with “our daughter” (ἡ θυγάτηρ ἡμῶν) (Bu 7:7/Ph 7:8). Finally, Aseneth is spatially aligned in the reader's imagination as part of her Egyptian family as well: she sits right between her father and her mother, each of whom is identified by a parental title (Bu 4:5/Ph 4:7).

While convincing Joseph to meet Aseneth, Pentephres again calls her “daughter” and then immediately attempts to mark Joseph and Aseneth as kin: “our daughter (ἡ θυγάτηρ ἡμῶν) is [like] a sister (ἀδελφή) to you” (Bu 7:7/Ph 7:9).<sup>105</sup> Having earlier refused to meet her, Joseph now relents and accepts Pentephres' terms, calling Aseneth “my sister” twice in Bu 7:8/Ph 7:11 as he agrees to receive her (ἀδελφή μου and ἀδελφήν μου).<sup>106</sup> Pentephres then calls Joseph Aseneth's “brother” (τὸν ἀδελφόν σου) as he

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<sup>102</sup> This is the text from the family *d* witnesses. Family *b* witnesses have ἦν θυγάτηρ τοῦ αὐτοῦ, having introduced him as Pentephres the priest of Heliopolis in the previous verse (Ph 1:3).

<sup>103</sup> E has a paraphrase, while G and L2 lack the context. Otherwise, the Syriac version is the only witness which does not attest “daughter” here. Many witnesses add Aseneth's name just subsequently: “he said to his daughter Aseneth.”

<sup>104</sup> B and D have τέκνον, while Slav, Arm, F have family *b* witnesses have τέκνον [μου] Ἀσενέθ. Syr has “my daughter,” while 436 is the only Latin witness which identifies her simply as Aseneth, without *filia*.

<sup>105</sup> Family *d* witnesses do not have the word “like.”

<sup>106</sup> E does not have the second use of “sister.”

instructs his daughter (named as such in most family *b* witnesses: τῇ θυγατρὶ αὐτοῦ) to greet their guest (Bu/Ph 8.1).

Pentephres furthers his claim of the familial bond between “sister” Aseneth and “brother” Joseph as he urges them to kiss (Bu 8:4/Ph 8:3), a conventional means in Greco-Roman literature of constructing fictive kinship.<sup>107</sup> Joseph dramatically rejects Aseneth’s kiss, and this is the moment he employs the epithet “(the) living God” to draw a boundary line between them, as I outlined above (Bu/Ph 8:5). Joseph’s rejection of her kiss is also a rejection of the kinship link Pentephres has attempted to enact (cf. Bu 7:5/Ph 7:6, where Joseph remembers his own father’s admonition not to associate with “an alien woman” [γυναικὸς ἀλλοτρίας]). Aseneth is pointedly *not* his ἀδελφή, not his family – a position Joseph emphasizes with his long list of women whom he says he does kiss (in Bu/Ph 8:6, examined above), all of whom *are* kin. Before her repentance, then, Aseneth is principally identified in the story as the daughter of an Egyptian priest, separated from Joseph in both religious practice and kinship ties.

In the next narrative sequence – that of Aseneth’s seven-day repentance – the heroine is no longer represented by her familial relationship to Pentephres; rather, she pointedly has no kinship ties.<sup>108</sup> In the language of the narrative, Aseneth is an orphan. In both of the earliest families of witnesses, Aseneth’s prayer to God mentions her ties to

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<sup>107</sup> Michael Penn, “Identity Transformation and Authorial Identification in *Joseph and Aseneth*,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 13.2 (2002), 174. As Penn remarks, “In asking Aseneth to kiss Joseph, her ‘brother’, Pentephres suggests an action that will overcome markers of difference and establish a familial connection between Aseneth and Joseph” (174).

<sup>108</sup> On Aseneth’s liminal status at this point in the narrative, see Rees Conrad Douglas, “Liminality and Conversion in *Joseph and Aseneth*,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 3 (1988), 31-42.

her father (ὁ πατήρ μου) and mother (ἡ μήτηρ μου) only to say that they have undone the precise kinship relationship which the narrative has taken pains to establish: Aseneth's Egyptian parents have declared that she is no longer their daughter (θυγάτηρ; Bu 12:12/Ph 12:11). She is, rather, an ὀρφανή (Bu 12:13/Ph 12:11). As she continues her long prayer seeking God's mercy, she describes her current condition as "orphanhood" (τὴν ὀρφανίαν; Bu 13:1/Ph 12:12).<sup>109</sup>

To the reader of the *Joseph and Aseneth* tradition as articulated in many *b* family witnesses, Aseneth's position of orphan comes as no surprise, for she has already named herself ὀρφανή at the beginning of her silent prayer in chapter 11. She has also said that her father (ὁ πατήρ μου) and mother (ἡ μήτηρ μου) hate her and have abandoned her (Bu 11:3-4), having disowned her as their daughter (θυγάτηρ; Bu 11:5). As she closes this prayer, Aseneth once again describes herself as in a condition of orphanhood (τὴν ὀρφανίαν μου) and foreshadows her impending new kinship relationship to the God of Israel, whom she here calls "the father of orphans" (ὁ πατήρ τῶν ὀρφανῶν; Bu 11:12-13).<sup>110</sup>

As I demonstrated above, when the angelic man comes to communicate God's acceptance of Aseneth, he confirms that she has been given new life (Bu 15:4-5/Ph 15:3-4). Just subsequently, he tells Aseneth of a new family bond: she will be the bride of Joseph (Bu 15:6/Ph 15:5). When Pharaoh later performs their wedding, he makes it

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<sup>109</sup> In some family *b* witnesses, she self-describes as an orphan (ὀρφανή) one to two additional times (Bu 12:14; 13:2).

<sup>110</sup> In some family *b* witnesses, she calls herself an orphan again in Bu 11:16 and 12:5.

explicit that marrying Joseph entails a kinship relationship with Israel's God, the God to whom Aseneth the orphan has fled: she shall be not only bride of Joseph but also *daughter* (θυγάτηρ) of Joseph's God.<sup>111</sup> Along with new life, Aseneth receives a new family. It is unambiguous in *Joseph and Aseneth*, then, that the activity of the "living God" vis-à-vis Aseneth allows this non-Israelite to cross the boundary and become part of the family of Israel, rendering this narrative's conception of the relationship of "the living God" to gentiles more optimistic than any other treated in this dissertation. This interpretation is confirmed through an examination of yet another corollary of Aseneth's receipt of new life: her new name.

### **New Life, New Name: Aseneth's Transformed Identity**

Along with new life and a new family, Aseneth receives a new identity. In both of the earliest forms of Aseneth's story, the angelic man tells Aseneth that she will be renamed "City of Refuge," as she will become a shelter for "many nations" who come to the God of Israel (Bu 15:7/Ph 15:6).<sup>112</sup> Scholars have long recognized that Aseneth's new position makes her a paradigm for – and protector of – future non-Israelites who repent of their idolatry and turn to the God of Israel.<sup>113</sup> The biblical background of the

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<sup>111</sup> In the second half of *Joseph and Aseneth*, the narrator paints a vivid picture of Aseneth's incorporation in her new family, as she ferociously hugs Joseph's father Jacob (*b* witnesses: as her own) and kisses him (Bu 22:9/Ph 22:5; cf. Bu/Ph 22:3, where Aseneth says that Jacob is a father [*d*] or is like a father [*b*] to her).

<sup>112</sup> The Slavonic version is alone in its attestation of "city" rather than "city of refuge." This passage is lost in the Syriac. All other *b* and *d* witnesses attest Aseneth's position as "city of refuge" for "(many) nations." (FW and L1 lack πολλά.)

<sup>113</sup> See as examples, John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 214; Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 216-18. On the relationship of Aseneth's role as city of refuge to the symbolism of the honeycomb, see Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis," 133-57. I return to Aseneth's status as "City of Refuge" in Chapter Five below.

cities of refuge reveals that Aseneth's new name also participates in the narrative's broader life/death motif: in Israel's scriptures, God commands the cities' construction in order to protect both Israelite and alien from being put to death for involuntary manslaughter (Numbers 35).<sup>114</sup> The city of refuge was thus a divinely-mandated place of safety to which offenders could flee and, in spite of their offense, live. Here this image serves as an appropriate concretization of what has happened to Aseneth in the language of the narrative: she has safely moved from death to life. And now she represents a place of shelter so that others too may be afforded life.

In *Joseph and Aseneth*, then, the living God's gift of life to the heroine has significant consequences. While the narrative has employed the epithet initially to draw hard boundaries between Joseph and Aseneth (Bu/Ph 8:5), *Joseph and Aseneth* eventually makes this boundary permeable, as Aseneth the Egyptian becomes incorporated into Joseph's family – the family of Israel – and serves as a model for others who follow suit and so too receive life. Indeed, the angelic man indicates that the comb of *life* is not just for Aseneth; others who repent will eat of it as well (Bu 16:4/Ph 16:7).

### **The Living God in Distinctive Expressions of *Joseph and Aseneth***

This rewriting of "(the) living God" in relationship to a non-Israelite becomes even more developed in the two other appearances of the epithet in the textual history of *Joseph and Aseneth*, those which belong not to the fabula but to distinctive expressions of Aseneth's story. By different means, each of these instances elaborates the theme inherent to the fabula which I have outlined in this chapter: the living God's gift of life to

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<sup>114</sup> See Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis," 135-136, and the literature cited therein.

non-Israelites. Both instances further “undo” the boundary instituted by Joseph’s use of the epithet in 8:5.

The first occurs on Aseneth’s lips as she prays to Joseph’s God at the conclusion of her seven-day period of repentance (Bu 11:10). Several witnesses (family *c*, Greek manuscript A [from family *a*], and possibly the Armenian version [from family *b*]) attest the epithet here.<sup>115</sup> She has thrown her idols out the window (Bu 10:12/Ph 10:13), put on clothes of mourning (Bu 10:8-10/Ph 10:9-11), and wept and fasted for seven days (Bu 10:15-17/Ph 10:17-20).<sup>116</sup> Aseneth then prays silently, expressing her sorrow at her former life of idol worship (Bu 11:8) and her timid reluctance to call upon the God of Joseph (Bu 11:9).<sup>117</sup> Aseneth talks herself out her hesitation by recounting what she has heard about this God: he is a “living God” (θεὸς ζῶν) who is also merciful (ἐλεήμων).<sup>118</sup> It is Aseneth’s tentative confidence in the compassion and gentleness of this “living God” which enables her to turn (ἐπιστρέψω) to God and there find refuge (καταφεύξομαι) from her defilement, the result of idol-worship, and from her orphanhood, the result of idol-

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<sup>115</sup> Burchard’s apparatus indicates that the Armenian version may read “God of the living” instead.

<sup>116</sup> Ahearne-Kroll includes this in her construction of the fabula: “Aseneth proceeds to go through her extensive process of mourning and repentance. She locks herself in her room, changes into mourning garb, sits in sackcloth and ashes, fasts, and cries for seven days. She also throws away her wealthy clothing and attire, all remnants of her idols, and all her sacrificial food and utensils” (“*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity,” 83).

<sup>117</sup> The witnesses which attest Aseneth’s first prayer but do not include the epithet are G (θεὸς ζηλωτής), E, FW, Syr, and L1. The Latin witnesses of 436 and 435&, along with the family *d* witnesses, do not attest this initial prayer and so thus do not have the epithet here either.

<sup>118</sup> As Everding briefly points out (“The Living God,” 268-70), and as I have shown in detail above, this prayer associates the epithet “living God” with God’s position as creator. Given Everding’s observation, it is surprising that he earlier comments that “the epithet θεὸς ζῶν is rarely used [in early Jewish literature] to specify God as creator, and never in the ‘philosophical’ sense of the ‘cause of life’” (“The Living God,” 118). It is precisely this meaning that I argue the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* constructs.

abandonment (Bu 11:11-14).<sup>119</sup> In this form of the *Joseph and Aseneth* tradition, then, Aseneth's confession that Joseph's God is a "living God" is a literary marker which challenges the boundary initially forged by Joseph's use of the epithet in Bu/Ph 8:5, as she repents of the very practice which caused her separation in the first place, her worship of "dead" idols.<sup>120</sup>

A final instance of the epithet in the manuscripts of *Joseph and Aseneth* occurs in disparate witnesses at a different, but similarly pivotal, moment in her story. When Joseph finally sees Aseneth after her transformation and recognizes that God has blessed her, he says that she will forever be a "city of refuge" (τῆς καταφυγῆς) for "(the) children of the living God" ([οἱ] υἱοὶ τοῦ ζῶντος θεοῦ) (Bu 19:8).<sup>121</sup> I have already shown that the biblical category of creation, rather than covenant (as in Deuteronomy 4 and 5), is the primary theological lens through which Israel's "living God" is conceived in *Joseph and Aseneth*. Yet in the textual expression of the tradition which includes the epithet in Bu

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<sup>119</sup> While ἐπιστέψω is ubiquitous in the witnesses which contain this prayer, καταφεύξομαι (or its equivalent) appears in Syr Arm L1 435&, and not in E or FW.

<sup>120</sup> Aseneth is not unique as a gentile character who utters the epithet (see Chapter Three), but she *is* unique in turning to worship the "living God" exclusively.

<sup>121</sup> This usage of the epithet occurs principally in family *a*, but it also shows up in the Syriac version, some Latin witnesses belonging to L2, and in Greek manuscript G. Since there is no overlap with the witnesses which contain the epithet at Bu 11:10, its appearance here represents another, distinct expression of the *Joseph and Aseneth* tradition. For the expression "(the) children of the living God," I have used brackets to indicate that some family *a* witnesses lack the definite article. The Syriac version has "children of the living God." Some witnesses of L2 have *fili dei vivi*, while 435& lacks the key adjective *vivi*. Greek manuscript G has ζῶντος θεοῦ υἱοί. The Armenian version does not have the epithet, attesting instead "many living sons (of) man." With respect to Aseneth as "city of refuge," family *a* witnesses have τῆς καταφυγῆς σου. Other witnesses (Arm 436 435& G) do not have the possessive adjective afterwards (τῆς [+σῆς G] καταφυγῆς). The Syriac likewise has "house of refuge."

19:8, Israel's covenant comes to play a role.<sup>122</sup> As is well-known, the expression “children of the living God” derives from Hosea's prophecy of eschatological restoration of the people of Israel and Judah who were previously called “not my people” as a consequence of abandoning the covenant:

καὶ ἦν ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ ὡς ἡ ἄμμος τῆς θαλάσσης ἣ οὐκ ἐκμετρηθήσεται οὐδὲ ἐξαριθμηθήσεται καὶ ἔσται ἐν τῷ τόπῳ οὗ ἐρρέθη αὐτοῖς οὐ λαὸς μου ὑμεῖς ἐκεῖ κληθήσονται υἱοὶ θεοῦ ζῶντος (Hos 2:1 OG).

Yet the number of the children of Israel was as the sand of the sea, which will not be measured nor numbered, and it shall be in the place where it was said ‘you are not my people’ there they shall be called ‘children of the living God’ (Hos 2:1 OG; my trans.).

The prophet contrasts idolatrous Israelites (“not my people”) with future eschatological Israelites who repent and are therefore called “children of the living God.” Taking the pattern of reversal to its logical conclusion means that the expression “children of the living God” is the reverse of “not my people,” and so the equivalent of “my people,” which evokes the original Sinai covenant (e.g., Exod 6:7; Deut 4:20) and participates in the prophets’ covenantal restoration motif.<sup>123</sup> Aseneth is thus cast as protector of the eschatological people of God who are in covenantal relationship with the God of Israel.

Interpreters of *Joseph and Aseneth* have long understood Aseneth's status as a “City of Refuge” for the “children of the living God” to mean that she is a model for and protector of future non-Israelites who repent of their idol worship and turn to Israel's

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<sup>122</sup> The narrative setting of *Joseph and Aseneth* is of course chronologically prior to that of God's giving the Law to Moses, but the later author would have had the category of covenant readily available.

<sup>123</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 45. Goodwin articulates helpfully the covenantal associations of the epithet here: “The expression ‘sons of the living God’ designates an Israel restored to covenantal relation with its God. The expression is closely linked to the covenantal formula in Hos 1:9; 2:1, and 2:25 LXX [‘I will be your God and you shall be my people’] so that the ‘sons of the living God’ are God's special ‘people.’” (*Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 46).



God.<sup>124</sup> And, indeed, in the earlier passage in which Aseneth is named “City of Refuge” (Bu 15:7/Ph 15:6), this is the most clear meaning. Yet Hosea 2:1, cited in *Joseph and Aseneth* 19:8, most immediately calls to mind errant *Israelites*. In the strand of textual tradition which includes the epithet here, Aseneth’s movement from idol worshiper to a worshiper of God alone does supply a pattern, but it is not one that is reserved only for gentiles. Her movement from death – from “not my people” (literally: not part of Israel) – to life, a metaphor for covenantal inclusion, serves as a model for all idolators regardless of ethnic affiliation.<sup>125</sup> In this telling of the *Joseph and Aseneth* tradition, the “living God” not only gives life to a non-Israelite but also uses this transformed Egyptian to mediate mercy to transgressive Israelites who deserve death but are instead offered life.

And yet Aseneth’s position as “model penitent” (to borrow a descriptor from Ahearne-Kroll) and mediator does not undermine the striking reality that non-Israelites are here considered part of the “children of the living God.”<sup>126</sup> When the two “City of Refuge” passages are paired, it becomes clear that the nations who take refuge in Aseneth

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<sup>124</sup> See as examples, Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 216-18; Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 128, 136-37; and Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 214.

<sup>125</sup> Ahearne-Kroll makes a similar point on different grounds (“*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity,” 239-43). Goodwin is right to point to the covenantal overtones of the epithet in 19:8 and to note that this scene represents a distinctive usage of Hosea 2:1 LXX since it here refers to non-Israelites (cf. 3 Macc 6:28 and Esth 8:12 LXX, discussed in Chapter Two above). I disagree, however, with Goodwin’s interpretation that “the children of the living God” in 19:8 are “proselytes who flee from idolatry and find refuge in the Jewish community through conversion” (*Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 62). The “children” are not only gentiles but also Israelites who repent of idolatry and find refuge not in the Jewish community, but in Aseneth, who serves in part as an example of a penitent accepted by God. Goodwin (along with Everding, who offers a similar but not-as-developed interpretation [“The Living God,” 221-24]) overlooks Aseneth’s unique status as a mediatory figure here. I develop this interpretation of Aseneth more fully in Chapter Five.

<sup>126</sup> I discuss Paul’s similar use of the Hosea expression “children of the living God” (Rom 9:25-26) in Chapter Five.

(in chapter 15) are implicitly included in the “children of the living God,” in “my people,” in the covenant. In this articulation of Aseneth’s story, then, the heroine is not only a model for Israelite and non-Israelite repentance, but she is also something more profound: a (repentant) non-Israelite whom “the living God” has transformed into a mediator of the (restored) covenant for God’s “children,” which includes repentant Israelites *and* non-Israelites. With the final usage of the epithet, this strand of *Joseph and Aseneth* tradition thus elaborates even more fully the living God’s ability to give life to all.

So far, the character of “life” in *Joseph and Aseneth* that I have been discussing is exclusively spiritual; it is the narrative’s metaphor for the benefits granted to those who exclusively worship Israel’s God, the “living God.” In the biblical and post-biblical narratives that I examined in Chapters One and Two, however, what is at stake is *physical* life and death in the face of Israel’s “living God.” In Part Two of *Joseph and Aseneth* (Bu/Ph 22:1 – Bu 29:9/Ph 29:11), lots of people actually die. In the next section, which addresses the motif of life/death in the final chapters of Aseneth’s story, I show that Aseneth ultimately becomes a mediator of life to Israelites in both of the earliest forms of her story (and not just the strand of tradition which includes the Hos 2:1 LXX reference in Bu 19:8).

## **Life and Death in Part Two of *Joseph and Aseneth***

Part Two of *Joseph and Aseneth* begins with an evil plan – one which soon turns the sons of Israel against each other and ultimately puts Aseneth’s life in danger. Pharaoh’s son is jealous of Joseph and wants to take Aseneth as his own wife, so he devises a plan to kill him and marry her. He unsuccessfully attempts to enlist Joseph’s brothers, Simeon and Levi, in his murderous scheme.<sup>127</sup> Simeon is so outraged at Pharaoh’s son’s proposal that he wants to kill him. With a strategic stomp on Simeon’s foot, Levi urges his brother not to draw his sword and strike the son of Pharaoh because such an action does not befit godly men. Then, after verbally admonishing Pharaoh’s son against his malevolent plot, Simeon and Levi threaten him with their drawn swords, which, they brag, are the same ones which God used to punish the Shechemites for Hamor’s rape of Dinah.

Pharaoh’s son is not deterred, and, still determined to kill Joseph and marry Aseneth, he lies to Dan, Gad, Naphtali, and Asher in order to recruit them as co-conspirators. These four agree to help Pharaoh’s son, whose plan requires them to kill their brother Joseph. Chaos quickly ensues, though, as Naphtali and Asher realize their folly and try to convince Dan and Gad not to proceed. The second-guessers ultimately relent, however, and the real conflict begins. The disloyal brothers and the men whom Pharaoh’s son assigned to their aid ambush Aseneth, who is traveling with Benjamin and

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<sup>127</sup> In Greek manuscript G and in the Syriac version, Pharaoh’s son couches his offer in terms of “life” and “death,” suggesting that the brothers’ participation will lead to life. (Other witnesses say “blessing” rather than “life.”)

six hundred men. The attackers kill all the forerunners of her security detail, and Aseneth escapes and flees.

Since Levi is a prophet, he senses that Aseneth is in danger and goes after her along with the other sons of Leah with swords, shields, and spears in tow. But the climactic encounter between Aseneth and Pharaoh's son, accompanied by fifty horsemen, takes place before Levi and his brothers can get there. In an appropriation of the story of David and Goliath, young Benjamin defends Aseneth by hurling a stone at Pharaoh's son; he strikes his left temple, but it is not a fatal blow.<sup>128</sup> It is not because of poor aim or lack of force, though, for Benjamin immediately kills the fifty horsemen of Pharaoh's son by hurling fifty more stones, one into each man's temple. Then the six sons of Leah arrive and slay two thousand of Pharaoh's son's troops.

Frightened, Dan and Gad resolve to kill Aseneth. As they approach her with their brandished swords, she prays to God. Her plea addresses God as the one who "made [her] alive (again)" and who said to her, "Your soul will live forever" (Bu 27:10/Ph 27:8).<sup>129</sup> God is thus marked again as the one who gives life to Aseneth. God then grants her life once more by turning her attackers' swords to ashes. Upon realizing that God has saved Aseneth from their attack, the men immediately prostrate themselves before her and beg for mercy. She saves their lives by convincing the loyal brothers not to kill them.

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<sup>128</sup> On the present narrative's relationship to the David and Goliath story, see esp. Delling, "Einwirkungen der Sprache," 51; and Gordon M. Zerbe, *Non-Retaliatio in Early Jewish and New Testament Texts: Ethical Themes in Social Contexts* (JSPSup, 14; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 78-80.

<sup>129</sup> Of the family *d* witnesses, B and D lack this prayer, but it is present in the Slavonic version. Only one manuscript preserving the Armenian version includes it (332).

While it is true that many characters meet their end in *Joseph and Aseneth*, the heroine is pointedly not one of them, as the God who granted her life in Part One (Bu/Ph 1:1-Bu 21:21/Ph 21:8) continues to do so in Part Two. The second story in Aseneth's tale thus provides a physical analogue for the gift of spiritual life which she has already received from God. It is significant that Aseneth, a non-Israelite whose transformation has made her a fitting wife for Joseph and thus part of the family of Israel, is the only character in Part Two who offers life – and desires to preserve life – unremittingly. As this plot summary has highlighted, various sons of Israel either (1) try to kill each other, (2) desire to kill each other and/or Egyptians, (3) or actually do kill Egyptians. Even Levi, who urges Benjamin not to deal the fatal blow to Pharaoh's son (Bu/Ph 29.3), brags about his sword which massacred the Shechemites (Bu 23.14/Ph 23.13).<sup>130</sup> Anthea Portier-Young has rightly called attention to the narrative turn from Aseneth's *receiving* mercy from God, her refuge, to Aseneth's *showing* mercy to the treacherous brothers, thereby inhabiting her new role as City of Refuge as she shelters them from vengeance.<sup>131</sup> It is most helpful for the present project to restate the point in terms of life and death: Aseneth has received new life from God (spiritually and then physically) and now mediates God's mercy to Israelites by offering them life instead of death.

## Conclusions

In all of its textual expressions, Aseneth's story is one of a non-Israelite receiving new life from Israel's "living God," who is re-conceived as universal creator with a

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<sup>130</sup> As Zerbe lays out, the narrative is ambivalent towards (retributive) violence (*Non-Retaliatio*n, 74-76).

<sup>131</sup> Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis," 153-57.

torrent of language and imagery from Genesis 1-2 LXX. Yet new life is not all that has been offered to repentant, re-created Aseneth. She has been afforded a new family through her marriage to Joseph and and she has been offered a new role mediating life to others, both to members of “the nations” (Part One) and members of Israel (Part Two). In all of its textual forms, then, the story of Aseneth and Joseph constructs an articulation of Israel’s “living God” which allows and anticipates gentile inclusion. With its ultimately positive stance toward the relationship of Israel’s “living God” to gentiles, *Joseph and Aseneth* occupies a unique position among other narratives which employ the epithet.

In the next chapter, I explore the implications of my conclusions about the epithet “(the) living God” in *Joseph and Aseneth* for the scholarly discussion surrounding the narrative’s provenance and purpose. I contend that the boundary-constructing usage of the epithet in 8:5 provides evidence for the argument that *Joseph and Aseneth* fits best in Hellenistic Judaism in Egypt, where the Joseph narrative was used frequently as a platform for Jewish identity negotiation vis-à-vis non-Jews. With respect to the rhetorical agenda of *Joseph and Aseneth* (that is, its originating purpose), I argue that the narrative’s use of “living God” terminology renders the narrative best considered as a participant in Second Temple period inner-Jewish debates over the possibility of and legitimacy of gentile access to Israel’s God and Jewish identity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ‘THE LIVING GOD,’ JEWISH IDENTITY, AND THE PROVENANCE OF *JOSEPH AND ASENETH*

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that for *Joseph and Aseneth*, the God of Israel is “the living God” who created all and who can therefore give life to all, including gentiles. In its portrayal of “the living God” as giver of life to non-Israelites, the narrative redeploys a strand of “living God” terminology in Israel’s scriptures in which the epithet functions as a boundary marker between God-and-Israel, on the one hand, and non-Israelites, on the other. In the present chapter, I argue that the identity negotiation inherent to *Joseph and Aseneth*’s boundary definition project contributes further to the argument that this text was composed by a Jewish author living in Greco-Roman Egypt. After presenting a brief history of scholarship on the narrative’s date, provenance, and religious designation, I suggest that *Joseph and Aseneth* is best understood as a participant in an interpretive strategy unique to Jewish authors writing in Greco-Roman Egypt wherein Joseph’s story serves as a platform for advocating a particular construal of Jews’ relationship to Egypt and Egyptian culture. Only then do I, in the subsequent chapter, proceed to explore the function of *Joseph and Aseneth*’s use of the epithet within

the wider landscape of Second Temple Judaism. For the meantime, however, the question of whether Aseneth's tale is even a Jewish composition demands attention.

### **Is Aseneth Jewish or Christian?**

Chesnutt was right to comment that Aseneth “has undergone more than one conversion at the hands of her modern interpreters.”<sup>1</sup> Disagreement over whether her tale is a Jewish or Christian composition has led to back-and-forth arguments over whether Aseneth is meant to represent a Jewish or Christian convert.<sup>2</sup> Just before the turn of the twentieth century, P. Batiffol published the first full Greek text of *Joseph and Aseneth*, which he understood to be a fifth-century Christian composition.<sup>3</sup> Batiffol subsequently amended his position to accommodate the view that *Joseph and Aseneth* was a first-century CE Christian reworking of a Jewish story, but his initial view was influential in subsequent scholarship on the narrative.<sup>4</sup> The notion that *Joseph and Aseneth* was a late Christian text, for example, led to its exclusion from the collections of Jewish pseudepigrapha published by E. Kautzch and R. H. Charles and from E. R.

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<sup>1</sup> Randall D. Chesnutt, review of Ross Shepherd Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph* (JBL 119.4 [2000], 760-762). Until I discuss Ross Kraemer's work, my sketch of the history of research on *Joseph and Aseneth* draws upon Chesnutt's extensive summary in *From Death to Life*, 20-64, to which I direct the reader for more information. See also Edith Humphrey, “On Bees and Best Guesses: The Problem of *Sitz im Leben* from Internal Evidence as Illustrated by *Joseph and Aseneth*,” *CR:BS* 7 (1999), 223-36. In this section, I present only the most relevant details for my argument in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> I return below to the inherent problems in the way this question has been traditionally formulated (i.e., by opposing two stable entities called “Judaism” and “Christianity”).

<sup>3</sup> P. Batiffol, *Le livre de la prière d'Aseneth* (Studia Patristica: Etudes d'ancienne littérature chrétienne [Paris: Leroux, 1889-90]).

<sup>4</sup> P. Batiffol, Review of *Apocrypha Anecdota II* [Texts and Studies, 5.1], by M. R. James, *RB* 7 [1898], 302-304). See Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 23-24.



Goodenough's work on Jewish mystery cults.<sup>5</sup> Yet many scholars rejected the Christian origin, the late date, or both, in favor of an earlier date and a gnostic Christian origin or a non-Christian Jewish designation.<sup>6</sup>

*Joseph and Aseneth* received much more widespread scholarly attention beginning in the 1950s when New Testament scholars began to identify the narrative as an important document for understanding Christian origins.<sup>7</sup> A published exchange between G. D. Kilpatrick and J. Jeremias on the Eucharist secured for *Joseph and Aseneth* "a permanent place among those Jewish writings considered significant for the study of the New Testament and early Christianity."<sup>8</sup> Coinciding with this attention was a scholarly interest in locating *Joseph and Aseneth* in early Judaism, an enterprise which was encouraged by the Qumran findings and which took form frequently in scholars' identifying the narrative as a product of specific Jewish sects, such as the Therapeutae or the Essenes.<sup>9</sup> During the following decade, Burchard and Philonenko published their ground-breaking monographs discussed in the previous chapter. Though these scholars disagreed on which textual witnesses were closer to the original text of *Joseph and*

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<sup>5</sup> See Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 25. E. Kautzsch, *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments* (2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1900); R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* (2 vols; Oxford: Clarendon, 1913); E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935). For more information on the impact of Batiffol's work on specific scholars, see Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 23-30.

<sup>6</sup> For details, see Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 26-30.

<sup>7</sup> Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 30.

<sup>8</sup> Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 31. He cites G. D. Kilpatrick, "The Last Supper," *ExpT* 64 (1952), 4-8; and J. Jeremias, "The Last Supper," *ExpT* 64 (1952), 91-92.

<sup>9</sup> Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 31-34.

*Aseneth*, they both understood the narrative (at least in its earliest form) to be a non-Christian Jewish composition.<sup>10</sup>

The designation of *Joseph and Aseneth* as a non-Christian Jewish work composed in Egypt between 100 BCE and 115 CE dominated scholarship on the narrative until Ross Kraemer raised serious objections (addressed below), which were ultimately published in her 1998 monograph.<sup>11</sup> Chesnutt notes that, with respect to the (pre-Kraemer) scholarly agreement surrounding an Egyptian origin, “[t]here is good reason for this strong consensus even if the matter cannot be considered closed and the Egyptian provenance certain.”<sup>12</sup> The reasons are cumulative: (1) the narrative setting in Leontopolis and the surrounding area; (2) the enormous efforts of the narrative to show the superiority of Israel’s God to the gods of Egypt and of Joseph to the son of Pharaoh; (3) the interspersed connections to Egyptian culture, including Aseneth’s affinities to the Egyptian goddess Neith.<sup>13</sup> The first major point scholars make in support of the 100 BCE - 115 CE dating is the familiarity of the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* with the

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<sup>10</sup> Burchard, *Untersuchungen*, 142-44; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 101-109.

<sup>11</sup> Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*.

<sup>12</sup> Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 78.

<sup>13</sup> Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 78. Philonenko was the first to point out Aseneth’s correspondence to Neith (*Joseph et Aséneth*, 61-79). Ahearne-Kroll has also argued for an Egyptian provenance in part based on affinities with Egyptian symbols. I treat her proposal below.

LXX/OG.<sup>14</sup> *Joseph and Aseneth*, the logic goes, must have been composed after the Hebrew Bible's Greek translation became available, which may be cautiously dated to 100 BCE.<sup>15</sup> Once one accepts a Jewish designation and Egyptian provenance for *Joseph and Aseneth*, the *terminus ante quem* is dependent upon knowledge of the historical circumstances of the Jewish communities in Egypt. *Joseph and Aseneth* was almost certainly written before the Jewish revolt in 115-17 CE, when Alexandria's Jewish communities were devastated almost to the point of extinction. Some scholars suggest an even earlier *terminus ante quem* of the pogroms against Jews in 38-41 CE, after which the narrative's "conciliatory attitude toward Gentiles" would be less likely to have been developed.<sup>16</sup>

In her 1998 monograph entitled *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, Kraemer critiques what she sees as a pattern of circular reasoning inherent to the consensus view, wherein scholars assign *Joseph and Aseneth* a date prior to the second century CE based on evidence garnered as a result of the assumption that the narrative was composed by a Jew

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<sup>14</sup> The familiarity with the Greek translation of Israel's scriptures is not in itself a point of contention, as I have previously stated. Yet, some scholars have suggested a different date in spite of this reality. Gideon Bohak, for example, dates *Joseph and Aseneth* to the mid-second century BCE, arguing for an earlier date for the author's access to the LXX/OG (*Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis* [SBLEJL 10; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996]). For a critique of Bohak's proposal that the narrative was composed as a defense of the Oniad temple, see Randall D. Chesnutt, "From Text to Context: The Social Matrix of *Joseph and Aseneth*," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1996 Seminar Papers*, ed. K. H. Richards (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 290-92. Edith Humphrey, who offers a useful and balanced review of Bohak's argument, challenges the notion that *Joseph and Aseneth* may be reduced to having only such a narrow, single purpose (*Joseph and Aseneth*, 33-37).

<sup>15</sup> See Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 80; and Ahearne-Kroll, "Joseph and Aseneth and Jewish Identity," 146-47.

<sup>16</sup> Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 80-85 (quotation from 85).

living in Egypt.<sup>17</sup> Citing numerous angelic adjuration parallels, Kraemer's case against the consensus position makes much of the fact that *Joseph and Aseneth* shares affinities with two late antique Christian hagiographies and that the extant manuscripts of *Joseph and Aseneth* were transmitted exclusively by Christians. Kraemer argues that the earliest forms of *Joseph and Aseneth* are best understood as literary products of late antique Christianity in Syria.

Kraemer's case for the Christian character of the narrative has not, for the most part, proven persuasive.<sup>18</sup> Chesnutt, for example, has disputed the worthiness of the parallels which Kraemer offers.<sup>19</sup> While *Joseph and Aseneth* indeed depicts an encounter with an angel, it is Aseneth's conversion which is really at the heart of the story: "the narrative itself emphasizes Aseneth's repentance, confessions, and renunciation of idols, not any adjurative formulas or theurgic techniques distinctive of the materials Kraemer cites."<sup>20</sup> He challenges, furthermore, the value of Kraemer's point about the Christian transmission of the textual witnesses. While it is indeed the case that the absence of explicitly Christian content cannot exclude the possibility of Christian authorship, Christian transmission of a text cannot serve as a basis for assuming Christian

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<sup>17</sup> Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 225-306.

<sup>18</sup> An exception is Rivka Nir, whose more recent case for Christian composition (*Joseph and Aseneth: A Christian Book* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012]) I engage below. While Kraemer's conclusions have not convinced most, her work posed an important challenge to the consensus view. Post-Kraemer, scholars who think *Joseph and Aseneth* is a Jewish composition have rightly sought to justify this position with more evidence and better arguments.

<sup>19</sup> See Chesnutt's review of Kraemer, 760-762.

<sup>20</sup> Chesnutt, review of Kraemer, 761. Ahearne-Kroll makes a similar point with more detail ("*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity," 154-58); see her dissertation for a careful response to each of Kraemer's arguments.

authorship.<sup>21</sup> Philo, Josephus, and the author(s) of the works which comprise *I Enoch* provide weighty counter-examples of ancient writers known to be Jewish whose writings were preserved by Christians.<sup>22</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, moreover, has demonstrated that Kraemer's arguments about *Joseph and Aseneth's* Helios imagery and alleged knowledge of Neoplatonic cosmology are not compelling and do not necessitate a late antique dating.<sup>23</sup> Many of the commonalities to which Kraemer points may be explained, in fact, in terms of "biblical influence."<sup>24</sup> For example, the book of Daniel (especially chapters 9-12) is more likely to be the model for Aseneth's actions in chapters 10-16 than the late antique hagiographies to which Kraemer points.<sup>25</sup>

The most recent scholar to revive Batiffol's original conclusion and argue for a Christian designation is Rivka Nir (2012). Her large claims are that (1) Aseneth represents a Christian, rather than a Jewish, convert because Aseneth's honeycomb meal most closely parallels the Christian Eucharist (chapter 1); (2) Aseneth's post-conversion status as "City of Refuge" renders her best understood as the heavenly Jerusalem, a symbol of the Christian Church (chapter 2); (3) Joseph is a typological figure representing Jesus, in part because of his resemblance to Helios (chapter 3); (4) the characters of Joseph and Aseneth may therefore be interpreted as symbols of Christ and

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<sup>21</sup> Chesnutt, review of Kraemer, 762.

<sup>22</sup> See also Ahearne-Kroll, "*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity," 152-53.

<sup>23</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, "*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity," 158-163.

<sup>24</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, "*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity," 167.

<sup>25</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, "*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity," 226-39.

the Church, respectively (chapter 4); and (5) the ethical principles advanced in Part Two of *Joseph and Aseneth* are best understood in light of Christian parallels (chapter 5).

The fundamental flaw with Nir's case for Christian authorship is methodological, and it is the same one which Chesnutt's groundbreaking *From Death to Life* sought to correct in 1995. Before Chesnutt, scholars focused on Aseneth's conversion principally through a history-of-religions lens. They attempted to identify specific elements of her conversion process which matched up with known practices in ancient Judaism or Christianity.

Chesnutt demonstrated that comparative analysis should be preceded by an understanding of Aseneth's conversion within the literary contours of the narrative of *Joseph and Aseneth* as a whole. This is an important methodological point which has proven influential in subsequent scholarship: one must begin with the world inside the narrative before attempting to draw parallels to the world outside the text.<sup>26</sup>

Nir's argument reverses this process: she starts with outside (Christian) parallels and then interprets the narrative through a framework she builds based on those parallels. In so doing, Nir mischaracterizes the view of scholars who assign a Jewish designation to *Joseph and Aseneth*. She begins her case against them with the statement that "[a]ll scholars who maintain that *Joseph and Aseneth* is a Jewish work assume that Aseneth's conversion has to be seen as a Jewish *giyyur*."<sup>27</sup> This claim is simply not true. Chesnutt, for example, argues that *Joseph and Aseneth* is a Jewish work on the basis of evidence *within* the narrative, including the fact that the tale betrays hints of discord between

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<sup>26</sup> I follow this methodology in this dissertation by first articulating the logic of the "living God" in the narrative on its own terms and only then attempting to historicize it.

<sup>27</sup> Nir, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 23.

converts and natural-born Israelites and among natural-born Israelites over the issue of converts (both of which are best explained by a Jewish rather than Christian setting).<sup>28</sup>

John Collins argues that the fundamental concern of the entire literary work is the issue of intermarriage between a biblical patriarch and an Egyptian woman, a concern which makes more sense in a Jewish context.<sup>29</sup> He interprets *Joseph and Aseneth* using internal evidence first, and without insisting, as Nir's opening sentence would suggest, that Aseneth's conversion must match up with external parallels about Jewish conversion.

The question which immediately follows Nir's initial claim sets up the agenda of her first chapter, the conclusions of which inform her interpretation of *Joseph and Aseneth* in all subsequent chapters. It is equally problematic. She asks: "Does the account of Aseneth's conversion fit with what we know about the procedure of Jewish conversion in antiquity?"<sup>30</sup> Nir proceeds to demonstrate that Aseneth's conversion does not in fact look like that prescribed or described in Talmudic literature (e.g., *b. Yeb.* 47a-b and parallels) or in the works of Josephus (e.g., *Ant.* 20.17-96).<sup>31</sup> This line of argument reveals that Nir's logic goes something like this: in order for *Joseph and Aseneth* to be a Jewish work, Aseneth's conversion must match up with Second Temple Jewish accounts of female conversion. This is an unsound assumption. The narrative setting of *Joseph and Aseneth* is the patriarchal period; one should not therefore demand correspondences with later rituals, especially from Talmudic material whose early dating is disputed.

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<sup>28</sup> Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 108-117.

<sup>29</sup> John J. Collins, "Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?," *JSP* 14.2 (2005), 102-107.

<sup>30</sup> Nir, *Joseph and Aseneth: A Christian Book*, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Nir, *Joseph and Aseneth: A Christian Book*, 23-34.

Aseneth's conversion need not line up with rabbinic prescriptions in order for her tale to be a Jewish composition.

The pivot in Nir's argument from attempting to dismantle the view that *Joseph and Aseneth* is Jewish to constructively arguing in favor of its Christian origin makes the same faulty assumption: she assumes that if Aseneth's conversion contains elements familiar to Christian conversion, then the story must be Christian. Even if all of the parallels Nir draws from *Joseph and Aseneth* to Christian texts were worthy parallels, that would not mean that the narrative is a Christian work, since there was a great deal of overlapping imagery, language, and ideology in Judaism and Christianity in antiquity. Nir acknowledges this reality without realizing its detriment to her argument: "But these prohibitions [against idolatry, intermarriage, and table fellowship with outsiders] characterize not only the Jewish attitude but also the Christian attitude to the pagan world."<sup>32</sup> The case for *Joseph and Aseneth*'s place in the history of religions cannot be made on the basis of external parallels to individual elements in the story which are detached from their narrative context and function. Any attempt to historicize *Joseph and Aseneth* should begin by interpreting the narrative itself in order to identify its internal logic and its rhetorical agenda.

Before I present my own argument about the provenance of *Joseph and Aseneth*, another methodological comment is in order. There is an inherent problem in the way the question about the narrative's provenance has traditionally been asked, which is whether this text is "Jewish *or* Christian." Such a formulation assumes that "Judaism" and

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<sup>32</sup> Nir, *A Christian Book*, 35.



“Christianity” are distinct entities without overlap, when it is now widely acknowledged that that these two categories were not mutually exclusive, easily identifiable, or certainly defined in antiquity.<sup>33</sup> The argument I present below situates *Joseph and Aseneth* as a Jewish document, and it is not outside the realm of possibility that the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* identified with a form of Judaism influenced by the Jesus movement. What is ultimately most important for my understanding of the tale’s significance in antiquity (which I develop in the following chapter) is that its author is intimately attached to a form of Judaism whose worldview distinguishes between ethnic Jews (“Israel according to the flesh,” to borrow a Pauline phrase) and everyone else. Paul’s own concern for this distinction, which I discuss in Chapter Five, demonstrates that it is possible for such a Jew to be a Christian Jew. It is therefore more profitable initially to consider not whether the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* is Jewish or Christian, but rather whether the author is Jewish (a term which could include Jewish-Christian) or gentile (meaning a gentile Christian).

In my judgment, *Joseph and Aseneth* is more likely to be a Jewish composition than the work of a gentile Christian because Hebrew ethnicity matters in this tale, a circumstance which makes more sense in a Jewish, rather than gentile Christian, context, since the former is a recognizable ethnic group and the latter is not. Collins raises this point in conjunction with the narrator’s comment that Aseneth did not look like Egyptian women, but was, rather, “in every respect similar to the daughters of the Hebrews; and

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<sup>33</sup> See esp. Daniel Boyarin’s model of the overlapping fluidity and dynamic flux between and among variations of the Judeo-Christian tradition in antiquity (*Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004]).

she was tall as Sarah and handsome as Rebecca and beautiful as Rachel” (Bu 1:5/Ph 1:7; Burchard trans.).<sup>34</sup> The assumption in the narrative is that Hebrews constitute “an ethnic group, with distinctive features. No analogous claims could be made about the daughters of the [gentile] Christians, who were not of one ethnic group.”<sup>35</sup> In the preceding chapter, I argued that *Joseph and Aseneth* challenges an ethnically-exclusive view of “the living God” by reimagining the relationship between this God and a gentile as one of life, not death. The boundaries the narrative enacts between its title characters are indeed religious, not ethnic, boundaries (a topic to which I return in Chapter Five). But it remains that ethnicity, in the sense of genealogy, is still a meaningful category in this narrative, even if it is not determinative for worshiping Israel’s God or even being part of Israel, the people of God. It is possible that a gentile Christian author retrojected this perspective on the assumption that it was appropriate to the narrative setting, but this scenario is less likely given that Aseneth’s appearance in the likeness of Hebrew women is neither fundamental to the plot nor suggested by a reading of the biblical text. I agree with Collins that this statement about “Hebrews” fits best in a Jewish context, where ethnicity matters more. The argument I have developed thus far in this dissertation (i.e., that *Joseph and Aseneth* rejects ethnically-delineated boundaries between “the living God” and non-Israelites by redeploying this biblical epithet) suggests that the narrative accepts the category of ethnicity *in order to challenge it* as a prerequisite for enjoying the covenantal blessings of Israel.

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<sup>34</sup> Collins, “*Joseph and Aseneth*: Jewish or Christian?,” 107.

<sup>35</sup> Collins, “*Joseph and Aseneth*: Jewish or Christian?,” 107.

I now move to a proposal for a more specific provenance. *Joseph and Aseneth* not only affirms an ethnic distinction between “Hebrew” and “others,” but it is also concerned about the relationship which Joseph, a Hebrew patriarch, has with *Egypt* and Egyptian culture. I suggest that this fact provides evidence for the narrative’s specific origin in Judaism of Greco-Roman Egypt. Ahearne-Kroll is the most recent scholar to mount a constructive argument in favor of *Joseph and Aseneth*’s composition by a (non-Christian) Jewish author in Greco-Roman Egypt. She too focuses on the social dynamics in the narrative as major clues for identifying its main goals and then historicizing it:

...the entire narrative of JA negotiates a construction of Jewish identity within an Egyptian environment in which Hebrews lived alongside of and interacted with non-Hebrews. The acceptance of an Egyptian woman (Aseneth) marrying a Hebrew man (Joseph), promulgation of rules about intermarriage, prohibition of idolatry, and ongoing discourse about justifiable and non-justifiable retaliation are all guidelines that address an audience who faced similar issues.<sup>36</sup>

Greco-Roman Egypt, she contends, is the historical setting which best explains these concerns. The most forceful argument which Ahearne-Kroll develops in support of her view is that *Joseph and Aseneth* draws on the LXX/OG in combination with Egyptian royal images, all of which would have been familiar to Jews in Greco-Roman Egypt. She shows that, like other Egyptian Jewish biblical interpreters (Artapanus, Philo, and the Wisdom of Solomon), *Joseph and Aseneth* elevates the status of the patriarch.<sup>37</sup> The narrative, furthermore, portrays both Joseph and Aseneth in royal terms borrowed from

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<sup>36</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, “*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity,” 176.

<sup>37</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, “*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity,” 179-89.

“imperial representations of rulers in Greco-Roman Egypt.”<sup>38</sup> Demonstrating the intermingling of Jewish, Greek, and Egyptian traditions in *Joseph and Aseneth*, most compellingly in the honeycomb episode of chapter 16, Ahearne-Kroll suggests that this narrative functioned doubly to offer Jews in Greco-Roman Egypt a heroic account of Jewish “beginnings” in Egypt and to provide a “template of meaning for constructing Jewish identity in Egypt.”<sup>39</sup> I find Ahearne-Kroll’s argument persuasive, and the conclusions reached in this dissertation are compatible with her understanding of the narrative’s origins. In the next section, I suggest that the boundary-drawing function of the epithet “living God” provides further evidence for situating Aseneth’s tale as a Jewish narrative which negotiates Jewish identity in Greco-Roman Egypt.

### **Situating Aseneth: Jewish Identity Negotiation in Greco-Roman Egypt**

Ahearne-Kroll is the first to have pointed to the usefulness of comparing *Joseph and Aseneth* to the rich history of interpretation of the Joseph narrative in Jewish literature written in Greek in Egypt as a means of historicizing Aseneth’s tale. She demonstrates that *Joseph and Aseneth*’s selective use of the LXX/OG corresponds well to a known interpretive tradition in Egyptian Judaism: “the heightened interest in how the Jewish past in Egypt is recounted.”<sup>40</sup> Specifically, she claims, in the Wisdom of Solomon and in the writings of Artapanus and Philo, Joseph’s status is elevated in

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<sup>38</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, “*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity,” 193.

<sup>39</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, “*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity,” 198-265; quotations from 265.

<sup>40</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, “*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity,” 179.

comparison to that of other men.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, in *Joseph and Aseneth*, Joseph has an enhanced authoritative status when compared to his position in Genesis.<sup>42</sup> For example, he is presented in royal terms when he initially arrives to visit Pentephres (*Jos. Asen.* 5), and, in part due to his close relationship with Pharaoh, he becomes the “sole sovereign” over Egypt by the end of the story (*Jos. Asen.* 29).<sup>43</sup> *Joseph and Aseneth* thus fits nicely within this discursive trajectory which casts Joseph as an Israelite hero in Egypt, an interpretive move which serves to authenticate and celebrate the contemporary Jewish community in Egypt by pointing to its deep and distinguished roots there.

I argue that there is an additional similarity that *Joseph and Aseneth* shares with Hellenistic Jewish writers in Egypt which contributes further evidence to the cumulative case for the narrative’s origination in that milieu: its retelling of Joseph’s story is concerned with the patriarch’s relationship to Egyptian culture. I showed in the previous chapter that *Joseph and Aseneth* employs the epithet “the living God” (initially) to construct a boundary between the protagonists, whose religious practices separate them to the same degree as the chasm between life and death. In so doing, the epithet participates in the negotiation of Joseph’s identity vis-à-vis non-Hebrew (in this case, Egyptian) culture. One of the most famous details of the narrative which also advances this project is the reversal of a detail in Gen 43:32 LXX. In both Genesis and *Joseph and Aseneth*, Joseph dines alone. Yet, while the Genesis account says that “the Egyptians could not eat

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<sup>41</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, “*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity,” 179-86.

<sup>42</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, “*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity,” 187-89.

<sup>43</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, “*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity,” 187-88.

bread loaves together with the Hebrews, for it is an abomination to the Egyptians” (*NETS* trans.), *Joseph and Aseneth* depicts Joseph’s separate table as a result of the *patriarch’s* practice: he “would not eat with the Egyptians, for this was abomination to him” (Bu/Ph 7:1; Burchard trans.). Philonenko points to this moment as evidence of a “fundamental opposition” posed by the narrative between Jews and Egyptians, despite the presence of characters whose actions disrupt such division, including Aseneth, who ultimately crosses the boundary, and Pentephres and Pharaoh, who are friendly, even affectionate, with Joseph.<sup>44</sup> Given my conclusions in the previous chapter, Philonenko’s position must be modified slightly: the narrative insists on a fundamental division between Joseph (who is a God-worshiper) and Egyptian practice and culture (which are idolatrous).<sup>45</sup>

There is an important clue in both of the earliest forms of the story which suggests that the boundaries the narrative attempts to enact between Hebrew and Egyptian culture have relevance not only for the patriarch Joseph in his host land of Egypt but also for its original readers, living centuries after the narrative setting.<sup>46</sup> Once Joseph explains to Aseneth that he cannot kiss her because he worships God and she worships idols (Bu/Ph 8.5, treated in detail in Chapter Three), he generalizes this prohibition to include women

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<sup>44</sup> Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 48-49. Like many, Philonenko uses the (anachronistic) terminology of “Jew” rather than “Hebrew,” since he understands the narrative to have implications for the original audience, which he views as Hellenistic Jews. I use “Hebrew” when discussing the characters in the story and “Jew” when discussing later ancient interpreters’ use of the Hebrew characters to represent Jews of their present day.

<sup>45</sup> As John Collins has written, the narrative’s desired division is indeed religious rather than ethnic: “While the religion of *Joseph and Aseneth* preserves sharp boundaries over against polytheism, these boundaries are not identical with the boundaries of ethnic descent” (*Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 234). As I discussed above, the narrative accepts the category of ethnicity without employing it as a criterion for access to Israel’s God and to the blessings given to those who worship this God exclusively. I return to this in Chapter Five.

<sup>46</sup> Many have pointed out these clues (e.g., Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 99-100).

who worship God: they are not to kiss strange men (Bu/Ph 8.7). There is no reason in the plot for Joseph to extend his prohibition to a woman since not only is there no female character considering an exogamous union, but, at this point in the story, there simply is no woman who worships God.<sup>47</sup> What *Joseph and Aseneth* does here, then, is use the character of Joseph to articulate the proper behavior of God-worshippers more broadly, generalizing Joseph's refusal to kiss Aseneth into an example for the original readers to follow.<sup>48</sup> *Joseph and Aseneth* is thus interested not only in the bounds of Joseph's relationship to Aseneth but also in the relationship of Hebrews/Israelites/Jews to Egyptian culture.

I suggest that *Joseph and Aseneth*'s project of identity negotiation fits within a Hellenistic Jewish interpretive tradition in Egypt which employs the patriarch to advocate for a particular construction of the ideal relationship between Jew and the host-land culture of Egypt. In what follows, I show that Artapanus, Demetrius, Philo, and (more tentatively) the Wisdom of Solomon each use the Joseph narrative for this purpose, whereas known authors outside this historical context tend to use it in other ways, and that this reality adds further evidence to the cumulative case for understanding *Joseph*

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<sup>47</sup> Randall D. Chesnutt, "Perceptions of Oil in Early Judaism and the Meal Formula in *Joseph and Aseneth*," *JSP* 14.2 (2005), 116.

<sup>48</sup> Similar examples of generalized directives, following the formula "it is not fitting...", occur in Part Two, when Levi twice advises against retaliation (Bu/Ph 23:9; 29:3). These directives are not examples of instructions clearly meant for readers outside the text, since they make sense wholly within the world of the story. It is the *irrelevance* of the directive in 8:7 to the events of the plot which highlights its intended relevance to the lives of the narrative's readers. (This does not mean, however, that the directives in Part Two were meaningful exclusively in the narrative setting. For a compelling exploration of their relevance to original readers in the proposed provenance of Greco-Roman Egypt, see Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 93-97, though he concludes that "the ethical teaching on vengeance and violence in *Joseph and Aseneth* is probably intended to apply to a socio-political situation broader than merely that of local interaction" [page 97].)

and *Aseneth* as a literary product of Judaism in Egypt. It is important to stress at the outset that I am more concerned with parallels of function than with overlap in content.<sup>49</sup> That is, I focus on the similar ideological *work* the Joseph narrative does for each author, for they do not share the same conclusions about the proper engagement of Hebrews/Jews with Egyptian culture.

I begin with Artapanus and Demetrius, both of whom were Jewish writers living in Egypt most likely during the third century BCE.<sup>50</sup> While their original writings have been lost, significant fragments have been preserved in excerpts of Alexander Polyhistor's *On the Jews*, which itself is preserved in Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica* 9. While their accounts of Joseph differ in the details, they both reveal a concern to ameliorate distinctions between Hebrew culture and Egyptian culture.

Artapanus's version of the Joseph narrative appears in Fragment 2 of his writings, which was excerpted from a work purportedly entitled "Concerning the Jews" (*Praep. evang.* 9.23.1-4).<sup>51</sup> Artapanus describes Joseph as a descendent of Abraham who "excelled all the other sons of Jacob in wisdom and understanding" (1). The subsequent account of Joseph's transport to Egypt is noteworthy, as Artapanus's Joseph not only anticipates his brothers' conspiracy but even arranges his own escape: he *requests* "the

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<sup>49</sup> Surveys of the character of Joseph in the hands of his later Jewish (and, to a lesser extent, Christian) interpreters are not uncommon. See, for example, Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 73-109, and the others cited throughout this section and the next. No one to my knowledge has yet organized the interpretations geographically, as I do here.

<sup>50</sup> On the dating and provenance of Artapanus's work, see Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors Vol 1: Historians* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 189-90. For introductory matters related to Demetrius' extant work, see Holladay, *Fragments*, 51-58.

<sup>51</sup> All translations of Artapanus are Holladay's (*Fragments*, 204-09).



neighboring Arabs” to take him to Egypt (1). Egypt is not a place for this Hebrew to avoid; it is where he wants to go.

In what remains of his work, Artapanus does not mention Joseph’s position in Egypt as peon of Potiphar, prey of Potiphar’s wife, or prisoner of Pharaoh. Rather, Artapanus emphasizes Joseph’s high position of power in Egypt: “After he came into Egypt and became acquainted with the king, he became minister of finance for the entire country” (2). In a section of material with no parallel in the Genesis narrative, Artapanus claims that it was Joseph who introduced viable farming practices to Egypt: in the face of the Egyptians’ haphazard and unjust procedures, “Joseph was the very first to subdivide the land, to indicate this with boundaries, to render much of the waste land tillable, to assign some of the arable land to the priests” (2).<sup>52</sup> Joseph furthermore “discovered measure[ments]” (3). Because of these achievements, he was “greatly loved by the Egyptians” (3). Artapanus then recounts Joseph’s marriage to the Egyptian woman Aseneth, “the daughter of a priest of Heliopolis,” and his Hebrew family’s relocation to Egypt (3). In an addition to the Genesis narrative, Artapanus says that members of Joseph’s clan built a temple in Athos and in Heliopolis. His retelling, which lacks mention of Joseph’s tricky business with his brothers, ends by praising Joseph’s storing of Egypt’s surplus grain, which led to his becoming “the lord of Egypt” (4).

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<sup>52</sup> Artapanus frequently attributes high achievements in Egypt to biblical characters, including Abraham and Moses. On this, see Lester L. Grabbe, “Jewish Identity and Hellenism in the Fragmentary Jewish Writings in Greek,” in *Scripture and Traditions: Essays on Early Judaism and Christianity in Honor of Carl R. Holladay*, eds. Patrick Gray and Gail R. O’Day (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 24-25. On Artapanus’s treatment of Moses in particular, see Rob Kugler, “Hearing the Story of Moses in Ptolemaic Egypt: Artapanus Accommodates the Tradition,” in *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen*, eds. Anthony Hilhorst and George H. van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 267-80.

Artapanus's account of the Joseph narrative is distinctive from the Genesis account in its exaggeration of the power the Egyptians gave Joseph, its heightening of the Egyptians' love for the hero, and, most importantly for the present project, its emphasis on the Hebrew characters' smooth integration into the land of Egypt. As Niehoff observes, "[t]hese features of Artapanus' Joseph story place the author in the context of a Jewish party which supported acculturation to the Egyptian environment."<sup>53</sup> Artapanus's presentation of Joseph indeed promotes the idea of cultural compatibility between Jews and Egyptians by stressing their commonalities and by portraying Joseph's family as assimilating to such a degree that they can even build a temple in Egypt. Furthermore, since Joseph created much of Egyptian cultural practice, there is no need for Jews to avoid it.

Demetrius's account of Joseph is similarly pro-assimilationist. The most significant passage for my purposes is one in which Demetrius supplies Joseph's motivation for not immediately sending for his hungry family to come to plentiful Egypt:

After he interpreted the dreams to the king, Joseph ruled Egypt for seven years. During this time he was married to Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of Heliopolis, and he fathered Manasseh and Ephraim. Two years of famine followed. But though Joseph had good fortune for nine years, he did not send for his father because he was a shepherd as were his brothers too, and Egyptians considered it a disgrace to be a shepherd. That this was the reason he did not send for him, Joseph himself declared. For when his kin did come, he told them that if they should be summoned by the king and were asked what they did for a living, they were to say that they were cowherds (Fragment 2, 12-13).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Maren R. Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 68.

<sup>54</sup> Holladay's translation (*Fragments*, 70-71).

Demetrius's retelling of the Joseph narrative is conspicuously pro-Egyptian. Joseph has, without qualms, married an Egyptian woman, had children with her, and chosen not to bring his Hebrew family to food-rich Egypt during a time of famine. Demetrius's explanation for Joseph's decision draws on Gen 46:34, which tells of Joseph's instructions to his family to represent themselves as cattle herdsman rather than as shepherds since shepherding is an "abomination" to the Egyptians. Not only does Demetrius include this detail, but he highlights it by suggesting that Joseph's concern about the Egyptians' disdain for his family's trade is the reason why Joseph did not bring his family to Egypt right away despite the fact that they were hungry. He did not want the inhabitants of his host land to find out that his family practiced an occupation which Egyptians found disgraceful.

Demetrius thus emphasizes Joseph's concern for his Hebrew family to be more like – or at least more acceptable to – Egyptians. He desires integration and acceptance even if it means lying. Like Artapanus's interpretation of the patriarch's story, Demetrius's narrative reveals a keen interest in the Hebrew characters' smooth integration in their host land, suggesting that this author also valued Jewish acculturation in Egypt. In what follows, I show that Philo likewise uses the Joseph narrative to negotiate Jewish identity vis-à-vis Egyptians, but his agenda is not to promote cultural compatibility.

A major puzzle in scholarship on Philo surrounds his two divergent, even contradictory, evaluations of the patriarch Joseph. In *De Josepho*, Philo extols Joseph as an ideal statesman, whereas in *De Somniis*, Philo sharply criticizes Joseph as a seeker of

vainglory.<sup>55</sup> Attempts to explain the reasons for Philo's dissimilar accounts have dominated the history of scholarship on *De Josepho*.<sup>56</sup> Many scholars have posited that Philo's variant portraits of Joseph have something to do with the writer's historical context as a Jew living in Egypt under Roman rule in the first-century CE, and invariably these explanations have to do with a distinction between Jew and gentile (either Roman or Egyptian). In 1906, for example, L. Massebieau and E. Brehier suggested that the change in Philo's perspectives was a result of the changing political climate of Alexandria.<sup>57</sup> On the one hand, *De Josepho*'s optimistic tone is the result of Philo's writing during a peaceful time; on the other, *De Somniis*'s pessimistic tone results from a time of tension between Jews and the Roman government. Massebieau and Brehier thus drew attention to contemporary Jew-gentile relationships as an important dynamic informing Philo's differing evaluations of Joseph.

A more thorough treatment of the question appeared in Erwin R. Goodenough's 1938 *The Politics of Philo Judaeus*. Goodenough argued that Philo's two perspectives on Joseph were the result of two different audiences: whereas Philo wrote *De Somniis* for Jews, *De Josepho* was aimed primarily at a gentile audience interested in Judaism.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> This tension has been long observed by scholars of Philo. For a succinct description of Philo's two variant presentations of the patriarch, see Earle Hilgert, "A Survey of Previous Scholarship on Philo's *De Josepho*," *SBL Seminar Papers* 25.1 (1986), 265-66.

<sup>56</sup> Earle Hilgert, "A Survey of Previous Scholarship," 262-70. The following history of scholarship (through Goodenough) has furthermore been informed by Jouette M. Bassler, "Philo on Joseph: The Basic Coherence of *De Josepho* and *De Somniis* ii," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 16.2 (1985), 240-43.

<sup>57</sup> L. Massebieau and E. Brehier, "Essai sur la chronologie de la vie et des oeuvres de Philon," *RHR* 33 (1906), 25-64, 164-85, 267-89.

<sup>58</sup> Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Politics of Philo Judaeus* (New Haven: Yale, 1938). See also his earlier article, "Philo's Exposition of the Law and His *De Vita Mosis*," *Harvard Theological Review* 26 (1933): 109-25.

Philo's purpose in writing *De Josepho* was to demonstrate to gentiles through Joseph's example what an ideal Roman prefect in Egypt should look like. Philo was communicating "to gentile readers the political philosophy which Jews wished gentiles to believe was theirs."<sup>59</sup> By contrast, Goodenough claims, Philo's purpose in writing *De Somniis* was to polemicize against the Roman administration in Egypt by portraying Joseph in veiled terms as a terrible Roman official. Philo was thus furtively communicating to other Jews "the bitterest hatred of the Romans."<sup>60</sup>

Capitalizing on this attention to the Jew/gentile divide as having explanatory power, Maren Niehoff has offered the most compelling explanation to date for the differing portrayals of Joseph in Philo's writing.<sup>61</sup> She locates the source of the tension in (1) the stringent distinction that Philo seeks to draw between the two opposing cultures of Jews and Egyptians, and (2) Philo's insistence on the separation of Jews from Egyptian culture. She supports these claims with a synthetic reading of Philo's works which shows that Philo, using contemporary anti-Egyptian rhetoric, represented the Egyptians as "Ultimate Other," the perverted cultural entity against which he could define the superiority of Jews and Jewish culture. She suggests that Philo interprets the Joseph narrative with one fundamental question in mind: "did [Joseph] compromise with

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<sup>59</sup> Goodenough, *Politics*, 62. See Bassler, "Philo on Joseph," 241.

<sup>60</sup> Goodenough, *Politics*, 42.

<sup>61</sup> Maren R. Niehoff, "New Garments for Biblical Joseph," in *Biblical Interpretation: History, Context, and Reality*, ed. Christine Helmer (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2005), 33-56; see also the chapter entitled "The Egyptians as Ultimate Other" in *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, 63-69.

Egyptian ways?”<sup>62</sup> Philo has contradictory presentations of Joseph, Niehoff maintains, because Philo presents him as ideal Jewish non-assimilator to Egyptian culture in *De Josepho* and as a problematic compromiser of Jewish practice and assimilator to Egyptian culture in *De Somniis*. In the following summary of Niehoff’s argument, I offer two additional pieces of evidence in support of her interpretation.

Philo’s portrayal of Joseph in *De Josepho* as Hebrew-in-Egypt *par excellence* is evident in the way in which Philo depicts Joseph’s rejection of Potiphar’s wife as a “paradigmatic refusal of Egyptian values.”<sup>63</sup> The importance of this scene merits its quotation in full. Joseph, speaking to the temptress, exclaims:

What are you forcing me to? We, the descendants of the Hebrews, live under special customs and laws. Among others it is allowed, from the age of fourteen onwards, to be freely intimate with harlots and prostitutes and those who make profit from their bodies, while among us a courtesan is not allowed to live, but the death penalty is appointed for the woman who plies this trade. Before the lawful union we do not know intercourse with other women, but come as chaste men to chaste virgins, seeking as the fulfillment of wedlock not pleasure, but the begetting of lawful children. To this day I have remained pure and shall not begin transgressing against the law by committing adultery, the greatest of crimes. Even if I had in former times departed from my accustomed manner of life and been drawn by the impulses of youth and had been emulating the softness of this land, I ought nevertheless not make the wedded life of another my prey (*Ios.* 42-44; Niehoff trans.).<sup>64</sup>

In his response to the woman’s illicit advances, Philo’s Joseph takes the time to explain the reason for his rejection. He self-identifies as a descendent of the Hebrews, a group which keep particular laws, in contrast to “others” among whom prostitution (as an

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<sup>62</sup> Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, 64.

<sup>63</sup> Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, 65.

<sup>64</sup> Niehoff’s translation may be found in “New Garments,” 40-41.

example of sexual promiscuity) is allowed. An important clue suggests that when Joseph says “others,” he means “Egyptians”: he subsequently refers to the “softness of *this* land,” a clear reference to Egypt, the land in which this scene is taking place. Joseph’s “we” and “us” language enacts further the distinction between his identity as a Hebrew and the Egyptian woman as “other,” whose ways Joseph eschews in favor of the more stringent law of his own kin using words which Philo has just described as “worthy of...his race” (*Ios.* 42; Niehoff trans.).

A comparison of this Philonic passage to its source material in Genesis provides further support for Niehoff’s claim. In Genesis, Joseph’s refusal of Potiphar’s wife is much shorter:

But he would not, and he said to his lord’s wife, “If, because of me, my lord has no knowledge of anything in his house and he gave everything that he has into my hands and nothing in this household is above me and he has not excluded anything from me except you, because you are his wife, then how shall I carry out this evil matter and sin against God?” (Gen 39:8-9 LXX; *NETS* trans.).

In the Genesis passage, Joseph rejects the woman *first* out of fidelity to his Egyptian master, who has given Joseph a great deal of responsibility. It is only after expressing what a grave betrayal of his master’s trust the adulterous act would constitute that Joseph characterizes the affair as a “sin against God.” The mention of his God is almost an afterthought. Joseph in Genesis is more concerned with what Potiphar, his Egyptian lord, would think.

In his retelling, Philo includes biblical Joseph’s reasoning that he should not betray his “master” and “benefactor” (46-47), but only as a supplementary argument, for Philo states that Joseph “put all these arguments together and philosophised in this way

till she ceased to importune him” (49). Thus, Philonic Joseph’s extended speech about Hebrew law versus Egyptian promiscuity is all the more striking when compared with the Genesis story, since Philo uses the opportunity to draw strict boundaries primarily between *Hebrew* and *Egyptian* rather than between *slave* and *master’s wife*. Philo’s main concern here is indeed Joseph’s rejection of Egyptian culture, not just his rejection of a single (Egyptian) woman.

Another passage in *De Josepho* which further develops Philo’s concern for the separation of Hebrew/Jew from Egyptian (the “other”) narrates the moment when Jacob finally greets Joseph in Egypt (paragraph 254). While Jacob is glad that his long-lost son is alive, Philo says, his happiness turns to anxiety about the fact that Joseph is alive *in Egypt*:

But his joy immediately generated fear in his heart about the prospect (of Joseph) changing his ancestral habits. For he knew that a youth by nature tends to slip and that living abroad gives license to committing sins, and especially in Egypt, a land blind to the true God, because of her turning generated and mortal things into gods. And besides, he knew the attacks wealth and renown make on minds of small understanding, and moreover left alone, without anyone from his father’s house having gone out together with him and chastising him, being alone and bereft of good teachers, he (Joseph) will be prepared for a change towards alien customs.<sup>65</sup>

As Niehoff observes, by portraying Jacob as concerned about Joseph’s potential acculturation to “alien customs,” Philo here posits an irreconcilable cultural divide between Hebrews and Egyptians.<sup>66</sup> Jacob worries that his son has changed his “ancestral habits” because he has been alone in Egypt, a land of idolatry. Egypt is perceived as such

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<sup>65</sup> Niehoff’s translation (“New Garments,” 36-37).

<sup>66</sup> Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, 65.



a threat to Israelite practices that Jacob's fear about the way in which Joseph as a Hebrew has fared in Egypt even outweighs the father's joy at discovering that his beloved son, once believed to be dead, is actually alive. As Philo continues the narrative, the reader learns that Jacob had no need to worry, for Joseph has been a faithful Hebrew (*Jos.* 257, 258, 262). Thus, as Niehoff demonstrates, Joseph in *De Josepho* is for Philo an example of how a Hebrew/Jew should live in Egypt, refusing to assimilate in any way to Egyptian culture.

I turn now to the second half of Niehoff's thesis: that *De Somniis*'s Joseph is the negative counter-example to *De Josepho*'s non-assimilating Joseph. In *De Somniis*, Philo is critical of Joseph and accuses him of arrogance, opportunism, and decadence, which, according to Philo, are negative characteristics belonging to Egyptians (*Somn.* 1:210-20; 2:10-14; 2:42-47; 2:63-66).<sup>67</sup> By Philo's logic, then, Joseph has developed these unacceptable behaviors because he has become more like his Egyptian hosts. Joseph's behavior is so despicable that Philo identifies with Joseph's brothers rather than with the patriarch: he makes a striking change to the Genesis narrative when he suggests that it is Joseph's *brothers* who need to forgive *Joseph* rather than the other way around (*Somn.* 2:108). He gives a long list of pre-conditions for such forgiveness:

When moved by a yearning for continence and a vast zeal for piety he rejects bodily pleasure, the wife of the Egyptian, as she bids him come into her embraces (Gen 39:7); when he claims the goods of his kinsmen and father from which he seemed to have been disinherited and holds it his duty to recover that portion of virtue which falls to his lot, when he passes step by step from betterment to betterment and, established firmly as it were on the crowning heights and consummation of his life, utters aloud the lesson which experience has taught him

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<sup>67</sup> Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, 66.

so fully: “I belong to God” (Gen. 50:19)...- then his brothers will make with him covenants of reconciliation.<sup>68</sup>

This passage demonstrates that Philonic Joseph’s assimilation in *De Somniis* is not complete or permanent. Rather, Joseph may become reincorporated into his Hebrew family by rejecting Potiphar’s wife (“the wife of the Egyptian”), by reclaiming the culture of his “kinsmen and father,” and by climactically confessing his allegiance to God. Only then can Joseph be forgiven. As in *De Josepho*, Philo interprets Joseph’s residence in Egypt as a real threat to his fidelity to the Hebrew way of life. But in the present passage, Joseph has “given in” by acculturating to Egyptian values and must overcome the resulting negative characteristics by rejecting Egyptian culture and returning to the God of the Hebrews.

In my judgment, the subsequent paragraph of *De Somniis*, which tells of an incident in Philo’s own history, provides further evidence for Niehoff’s claim that Philo is concerned with the relationship of Jews to Egyptian culture. Philo recalls a terrible prefect of Egypt who attempted to cause Jews to stop observing the Sabbath:

Moreover, it is only a very short time ago that I knew a man of very high rank, one who was prefect and governor of Egypt, who, after he had taken it into his head to change our national institutions and customs, and in an extraordinary manner to abrogate that most holy law guarded by such fearful penalties, which relates to the seventh day, and was compelling us to obey him, and to do other things contrary to our established custom, thinking that that would be the beginning of our departure from the other laws, and of our violation of all our national customs, if he were once able to destroy our hereditary and customary observance of the seventh day (2.123).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Niehoff’s translation (*Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, 66).

<sup>69</sup> Yonge’s translation.

The language Philo uses to tell this story is revealing: the “we” rhetoric (“our national institutions,” “our established customs,” “our hereditary and customary observance”) sets Jewish culture in stark contrast to the Egyptian prefect’s cultural complex. The proximity of this passage to Philo’s critique of Joseph suggests that Niehoff is right about Philo’s concern to separate Jews from Egyptian culture.

In his presentation of both negative and positive traits of the patriarch Joseph, Philo exploits a tension already present in the biblical source text. As Susan Docherty has commented, the character of Joseph in Genesis “stands out as of the most multi-dimensional or ambiguous figures encountered within the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures.”<sup>70</sup> For example, while he had the good judgment to refuse Potiphar’s wife and while his administrative skills made him very successful in Egypt (positives), he was boastful to his brothers about his dreams and then toyed with them when they sought food for themselves and their families (negatives). While most subsequent interpreters in antiquity exclusively celebrated or even enhanced Joseph’s virtues, Philo (at least in one instance) expounds upon the characteristics of which he disapproves. The commonality between Philo’s two contradictory depictions of Joseph is what is most important here: in both of them, Philo discourages Jewish assimilation to Egyptian culture.

Philo thus uses the Joseph narrative – in both his positive and his negative presentation of the patriarch – as a site of Jewish identity negotiation vis-à-vis Egyptian culture. While Artapanus and Demetrius advocate Jewish acculturation, Philo is antagonistic toward adoption of any Egyptian values or practices. What these authors

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<sup>70</sup> Susan Docherty, “Joseph the Patriarch: Representations of Joseph in Early Post-Biblical Literature” in *Borders, Boundaries, and the Bible*, ed. Martin O’Kane (London: Sheffield, 2002), 195.

have in common is that they retell Joseph's tale as a means of dealing with the same question: what is the proper relationship between Jewish identity and Egyptian culture? This common project points to the existence of a Jewish interpretive tradition in Egypt in which the two levels of narrative setting and contemporary context inform one another. For these Jewish authors living in Egypt, Joseph-in-Egypt became a cipher for Jew-in-Egypt.

A final literary work whose mention of the Joseph narrative merits discussion in this context is the *Wisdom of Solomon*, which is commonly thought to have been composed in Alexandria during the first century BCE or first century CE. Unlike with the works of Artapanus, Demetrius, and Philo, however, the primary evidence scholars use to locate the *Wisdom of Solomon* in Egypt is this text's harsh polemic against Egypt and Egyptian religion (e.g., 19:13-17).<sup>71</sup> Indeed, Egypt is the ultimate foil to Israel in chapters 11 through 19 as the narrator, purported to be King Solomon, explains God's consistent help for Israel and punishment of Egypt. Joseph is mentioned as the narrator explains divine Wisdom's role in ordering Israel's history (10:1-21). Wisdom, the reader is told, remained with Joseph when the patriarch was sold, when he was sent to prison, when he rose to rule Egypt and was vindicated in the face of his accusers (10:13-14). The next verse, which transitions to the story of the Exodus, sets up a stark contrast between Hebrews and Egyptians: "A holy people and blameless race wisdom delivered

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<sup>71</sup> See Lester Grabbe's cautious introductory discussion in *Wisdom of Solomon* (T&T Clark Study Guides; London: T&T Clark, 2003 [81-94]). On the book's ethnic particularism in combination with its universalist ideals, see Randall Chesnutt, "Covenant and Cosmos in *Wisdom of Solomon* 10-19," in *The Concept of the Covenant in the Second Temple Period*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Jacqueline C. R. DeRoo (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 223-49; and Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 181-93 (esp. 183-86).

from a nation of oppressors” (10:15 NRSV). I mention the Wisdom of Solomon here merely as a *potential* further example of the interpretive trend I have identified, for it would constitute circular reasoning to use the polemic against Egypt as evidence for situating the piece in Egypt and then point to the piece as evidence of a polemical interpretive tradition in Egyptian Judaism at the time.<sup>72</sup> But, overall, it seems more likely than not that the work was composed in Egypt and reflects contemporary Jewish-gentile tension there.<sup>73</sup>

So far I have pointed to three (possibly four, if the anonymous author of the Wisdom of Solomon is included) examples of ancient Jewish authors living in Greco-Roman Egypt whose retellings of Joseph’s story served as a forum for Egyptian Jewish identity negotiation with respect to non-Jewish Egyptian culture. Yet Joseph was an extremely popular character in ancient Jewish literature written in places other than Egypt as well as in Christian literature. If the Jew-in-Egypt identity formation project may be used to situate *Joseph and Aseneth* as an Egyptian Jewish document, I must show that Joseph’s story was not similarly employed by other ancient writers. In the next section, I demonstrate that Jewish interpreters in places other than Egypt, as well as Christian interpreters, focus on elements of the Joseph narrative other than the patriarch’s relationship to Egypt.

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<sup>72</sup> I exclude the fragmentary “History of Joseph” from my discussion for this very reason, as there is no evidence for an Egyptian provenance other than its polemic against Egypt. See G. T. Zervos, “History of Joseph: A New Translation and Introduction,” *OTP*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 468-69.

<sup>73</sup> J. M. Reese has argued that the work draws on Isis material to entice errant Jewish youth living in Alexandria to abandon the Isis cult and worship YHWH alone (*Hellenistic Influence on the book of Wisdom and its Consequences* [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970], 36-50).

## Joseph Outside of Hellenistic Judaism in Egypt

A survey of the evidence suggests that the project of identity negotiation through Joseph's relationship to Egypt is indeed isolated to Hellenistic, Egyptian Jewish tellings of the Joseph story. In other interpretations of the Joseph narrative, Joseph's position as a Hebrew in the specific setting of Egypt appears to bear no special significance. A prime example is the book of *Jubilees*, a second-century BCE document from Palestine which tells its own story of Israel's history from creation through the time of Moses.<sup>74</sup> *Jubilees* downplays the importance of Joseph in Israel's history.<sup>75</sup> As Betsy Halpern-Amaru has shown, the narrative rearranges received biblical material from Exod 1:1-8 so that, in contrast to the biblical story, "the death of Joseph is neither a turning point in the narrative nor of major significance in Israelite history."<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, the biblical scene of Jacob's final testament to Joseph (Gen 47:29-31) is replaced in *Jubilees* with Jacob's giving his books and the books of his father to Levi (45:16).<sup>77</sup> Joseph's status within the family of Jacob is thus not merely deemphasized; it is subverted to that of a different son (Levi).

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<sup>74</sup> On the date and provenance, see Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 73-74; and James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Guides to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 18-21. It is likely that *Jubilees* does not predate 175 BCE because of elements in the text which deal with live issues during the Hellenistic reform, such as nudity (*Jub.* 3:31). Citations of *Jubilees* in the Damascus Document (CD 16:3-4) suggest a *terminus ante quem* of 100-75 BCE.

<sup>75</sup> Betsy Halpern-Amaru, "Burying the Fathers: Exegetical Strategies and Source Traditions in *Jubilees* 46," in *Reworking the Bible: Apocryphal and Related Texts at Qumran: Proceedings of a Joint Symposium by the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature and the Hebrew University Institute for Advanced Studies Research Group on Qumran, 15-17 January, 2002*, ed. Esther G. Chazon, Devorah Dimant, and Ruth A. Clements (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 135-52.

<sup>76</sup> Halpern-Amaru, "Burying the Fathers," 136.

<sup>77</sup> Halpern-Amaru, "Burying the Fathers," 136-37.

In contrast to Joseph's weakened position within the family, his place in the public sphere of Egyptian leadership remains secure in *Jubilees*.<sup>78</sup> After briefly narrating Joseph's imprisonment (39:11-18) and successful interpretation of Pharaoh's dream (40:1-5), *Jubilees* describes Joseph's rise to power (40:6-13) and the peace which permeated the land of Egypt "because the Lord was with [Joseph]" (40:8-9).<sup>79</sup> Yet, a peaceful Egypt is incidental to the narrative as *Jubilees* tells it. There is evidence which suggests that, ultimately, peaceful relations within the house of Jacob most concern *Jubilees'* author.<sup>80</sup> Such an interest is apparent in *Jubilees'* account of Joseph's motivation for finally revealing himself to his brothers who have brought Benjamin to Egypt: "And Joseph saw that the heart of all of them was in accord one with another for good" (43:14). No such motivation is given in the Genesis narrative (cf. Gen 45:1). Furthermore, Joseph's story is interrupted by testaments spoken by Rebekah and Isaac which emphasize family unity. Rebekah urges Jacob (35:1-8), Isaac (35:9-17), and Esau (35:18-24) to pursue familial peace (esp. 35:1, 9, 20).<sup>81</sup> The major theme of Isaac's

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<sup>78</sup> Halpern-Amaru, "Burying the Fathers," 138.

<sup>79</sup> Translations of *Jubilees* are from O. S. Wintermute, "Jubilees: A New Translation and Introduction," in *OTP*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

<sup>80</sup> John C. Endres draws on Klaus Berger's work on *Jubilees* to suggest that the insertion of 34:20-39:2 functionally separates the Jacob/Esau story from the Joseph story, which are both fundamentally about "familial love and unity" (*Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Jubilees* [Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1987], 183; citing Klaus Berger, *Das Buch der Jubiläen* [JSHRZ 2.3; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1981]). Endres helpfully expounds upon this point: "Esau's enmity with Jacob contrasts poignantly with the final reconciliation of the Jacob family through Joseph's mediation. [*Jubilees'*] author, then, presented his community with a clear choice for their own day and situation" (*Biblical Interpretation*, 183). Endres uses the phrase "Agent of Reconciliation" to describe Joseph's overall role of peace mediation in 42:1-45:12 (*Biblical Interpretation*, 187).

<sup>81</sup> For a close examination of the content of Rebekah's testament, see Endres, *Biblical Interpretation*, 173-76. He rightly calls it a "Testament of Peace" (page 173).

testament (36:1-11) is that Jacob and Esau should to love God *and each other*. He tells them to “perform righteousness and uprightness” so that God will keep his promise to Abraham and Abraham’s descendants (36:3) and to “be loving of [their] brothers...with each man seeking what is good for him” (36:4; cf. the similar admonitions in verses 6-9).<sup>82</sup> If either of them “seeks evil against his brother,” he will be eternally destroyed, his name excluded from the “Book of Life” (36:8-11).<sup>83</sup> The relationships most at stake in this story are the ones between and among Jacob’s family members – not those with outsiders.

This focus on the house of Jacob rather than on the relationship of Hebrews to non-Hebrews is surprising when one considers that *Jubilees* is famous for its enmity toward gentiles and for its intense concern for Jews to remain completely separate from non-Jews.<sup>84</sup> Yet, in its treatment of Joseph’s story, *Jubilees* does not polemicize against Egypt, Egyptian culture, or even contact with Egyptian women. In fact, in a puzzling move, the author of *Jubilees* reports the marriage of Joseph to Egyptian Aseneth without comment (34:20; 40:10), even though the book develops an extremely strict ban of

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<sup>82</sup> Interestingly, while Isaac urges his sons to eschew idols (36:5), he does so without the anti-gentile rhetoric found in other idol polemic passages in *Jubilees* (e.g., 1:8-9; 20:7-8; 21:3; 22:16-18).

<sup>83</sup> Isaac’s advice does not take, however, as Esau, compelled by his own sons who hired gentile mercenaries, proceeds to mount a war against Jacob, leading to Esau’s death and to the Edomites’ servitude to the sons of Jacob (37:1-38:2).

<sup>84</sup> See esp. Jacques T.A.G.M. van Ruiten, “Abraham and the Nations in the Book of *Jubilees*,” in *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham*, eds. Martin Goodman, George H. van Kooten, and Jacques T.A.G.M. van Ruiten (Leiden, Brill: 2010), 105-16; and Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 73-74. I take up *Jubilees*’ views of the Jew/gentile boundary in more detail in the next chapter.



intermarriage (e.g. chapter 30).<sup>85</sup> Neither does *Jubilees* exploit Joseph's dealings with Potiphar's wife as a way to articulate its ban on interethnic sexual contact. The narrator reports that Joseph "remembered the Lord and the words which Jacob, his father, used to read, which were from the words of Abraham, that there is no man who (may) fornicate with a woman who has a husband" (39:6; cf. *Jos. Asen.* 7:5). The potential offense is not conceived in terms derived from Genesis 39 (i.e., a sin against a trusting master), which means that *Jubilees* has changed Joseph's motivation from that of its source text. Yet, in contrast to the rationale Philo puts in Joseph's mouth, the sin in *Jubilees* is understood as sexual union with a *married* woman, not with an Egyptian woman (as in Philo's *De Josepho*) or even a generic gentile woman. Thus, even though the entire book of *Jubilees* is deeply concerned for the purity of Israel vis-à-vis gentiles, the author does not use the Joseph story as a platform for developing this theme. This work therefore serves as a particularly significant example of a text written by a Jewish author outside of Egypt who retells the Joseph narrative for purposes other than Jewish identity formation vis-à-vis Egypt.

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<sup>85</sup> On *Jubilees*' ban on intermarriage, see Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 73-81; cf. Cana Werman, "Jubilees 30: Building a Paradigm for the Ban on Intermarriage," *HTR* 90.1 (1997), 1-22. James L. Kugel puts the point this way: "It is certainly striking that *Jubilees* mentions this marriage [between Joseph and Aseneth] at all (he certainly could have skipped it), since for him any close relations with non-Jews was a form of 'impurity' to be avoided at all cost. Perhaps significantly, he omits mention of the birth of the couple's two sons (Gen 41:50-52)" (*A Walk Through Jubilees: Studies in the Book of Jubilees and the World of Its Creation* [Leiden: Brill, 2012], 181).

First Maccabees likewise employs Joseph's story for a purpose other than evaluating his role as a Hebrew among Egyptians.<sup>86</sup> Mattathias mentions Joseph along with other Israelite heroes in a speech in which he urges his sons to "remember the deeds" of their ancestors so that they may "receive great honor and an everlasting name" (2:51 NRSV). Joseph is succinctly praised for having kept "the commandment" during his "time of distress" and then becoming "lord of Egypt" (2:53 NRSV). As Thomas Hieke has argued, Joseph's rise to power is here interpreted as having resulted from the patriarch's fidelity to Jewish law, and this biblical story therefore serves to provide a scriptural authorization for the Maccabean connection of law-observance with the right to wield political authority:

Joseph's *reward* for keeping the commandment is the *power* over Egypt (see Gen 45:9). What the text accentuates here fits perfectly well with the concept of the Maccabees: the connection between obedience to the Law and political power, or in other words, the justification of the exertion of political power through obedience to God's commandments. "Joseph" serves as a Biblical symbol for the idea that those who keep God's commandments are entitled to exercise political power.<sup>87</sup>

The focus of 1 Maccabees 2:53 is on the biblical story's link between Joseph's fidelity to the law and his position of authority. The point is that Joseph wielded power, not that

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<sup>86</sup> First Maccabees was likely composed in Hebrew during the first half of the first century BCE (during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus). See Jonathan A. Goldstein, *1 Maccabees*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 62-64. Fourth Maccabees also refers to Joseph (2:1-4), but I exclude it from my discussion because of a lack of convincing evidence for a particular provenance (H. Anderson, "4 Maccabees: A New Translation and Introduction," in *OTP*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth [New York: Doubleday, 1985], 534-37).

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Hieke, "The Role of 'Scripture' in the Last Words of Mattathias (1 Macc 2:49-70)" in *The Books of the Maccabees: History, Theology, Ideology*, eds. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007), 66.

Joseph wielded power *in Egypt*. The narrative setting of Joseph's story in Egypt is incidental.

Pseudo-Philo provides another example from Palestine whose use of the Joseph narrative does not deal with the patriarch's relationship to Egypt.<sup>88</sup> In the *Biblical Antiquities*, this author is more concerned with Joseph's relationship to his brothers. Pseudo-Philo's retelling of the Joseph narrative amounts to a brief summation of facts taken straight from Genesis, beginning with Joseph's brothers' hatred of him for no apparent reason (8:9). The dream sequence and Joseph's report of his impending rise to power are omitted. The only comment which could be understood as an interpretive gloss or value statement is the succinct judgment that Joseph "did not deal vengefully with [his brothers]" (8:10; Harrington trans.).<sup>89</sup> Pseudo-Philo is thus most interested in defending Joseph's actions towards his brothers. Egypt is only mentioned in order to locate it as the place where the brothers sold Joseph (8:9). Potiphar and Pharaoh are mentioned only to explain how Joseph came to the position of power from which he confronted the food-seeking sons of Jacob (8:9-10).

One document from the Qumran scrolls deserves mention because it refers to Joseph. In the fragment 4Q372 1, Joseph is invoked to represent the northern tribes of Israel as the author polemicizes against the Samaritans (and their temple at Gerizim) and urges the southern tribes to view their own fate as intertwined with that of their northern

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<sup>88</sup> Though the *Biblical Antiquities* of Pseudo-Philo is extant only in Latin manuscripts, scholars agree that the work was originally composed in Hebrew sometime during the first century of the common era, most likely in Palestine (D. J. Harrington, "Pseudo-Philo: A New Translation and Introduction," in *OTP*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 298-300.

<sup>89</sup> See Docherty, "Joseph the Patriarch," 212-13.

counterparts, who are still in exile.<sup>90</sup> This fragment is most concerned with (*all of*) Israel's relationship to God within the Deuteronomic pattern of sin/exile/restoration, and its ultimate "other" is the Samaritan (not the Egyptian, as in Philo, for example).

Yet another example of a Jewish author outside of Egypt who retells the Joseph narrative is Josephus, who composed his works in Rome in the first century CE. The Josephan Joseph is neither a heroic originator of Egyptian culture (as in Artapanus) nor a potential object of Egyptian cultural seduction (as in Philo).<sup>91</sup> Indeed, for Josephus, Potiphar's wife represents not the threat of Egyptian culture but of irrationality (*A.J.* 2.41-49), and Joseph's exploits do not include an ascent to Egypt's throne.<sup>92</sup> Josephus is much more interested in defending his namesake against charges of arrogance and to portray Joseph's destiny in accordance with the patriarch's dreams.<sup>93</sup> Josephus furthermore strives to present Joseph as the embodiment of virtue.<sup>94</sup> As Niehoff comments, "Egypt was not an issue for Josephus."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> See Eileen Schuller, "4Q372 1: A Text about Joseph," *RevQ* 14/55 (1990), 349-76; and Matthew Thiessen, "4Q372 1 and the Continuation of Joseph's Exile," *DSD* 15 (2008), 380-395. For the critical edition, see Eileen Schuller and Moshe Bernstein, "4QNarrative and Poetic Composition<sup>a-c</sup>," *DJD* 28:151-204. There were found at Qumran four fragments of a Testament of Jacob and five fragments of a Testament of Joseph (written in Aramaic and dating to the first-century BCE), known as 4Q538-9, but not enough remains to interpret. For an English translation of fragments 1-2 (comprising only seven lines), see Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 2004), 563.

<sup>91</sup> Niehoff, "New Garments," 48.

<sup>92</sup> Niehoff, "New Garments," 48.

<sup>93</sup> Niehoff, "New Garments," 48-49.

<sup>94</sup> See Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Joseph," *Revue Biblique* 99.3 (1992), 504-28.

<sup>95</sup> Niehoff, "New Garments," 48.

Jewish interpretations of Joseph's story written in places other than Egypt do not, then, place the focus on Joseph's relationship to Egypt, as do Artapanus, Demetrius, Philo, the Wisdom of Solomon, and *Joseph and Aseneth*. Likewise, Christian interpreters, in Egypt or elsewhere, do not exploit the narrative setting of the Joseph story as a means of negotiating identity. Their focus lies elsewhere. In Acts 7, for example, Stephen summarizes Joseph's story as part of his polemical review of Israel's history. The story is told in such a way as to criticize Joseph's brothers, whose jealousy is highlighted as their motivation for selling Joseph into slavery, and to demonstrate God's presence with Joseph through the reversal of his misfortune (7:9-10).<sup>96</sup> The major distinction is not Hebrew versus Egyptian but wicked patriarchs versus faithful brother.

The righteous behavior of Joseph in the face of his brothers' betrayal is a theme which looms large in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, which likely originated in Syria, and is, in its extant form, a Christian work.<sup>97</sup> This document views Joseph as "the ideal of moral behavior," presenting him as the paragon of virtue who successfully avoided promiscuity (*T. Reub.* 4:8-10) and who demonstrated compassion toward his

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<sup>96</sup> Earl Richard, "The Polemical Character of the Joseph Episode in Acts 7," *JBL* 98.2 (1979), 255-67. See also Hollander, "The Portrayal of Joseph," 254. The book of *1 Clement* is likewise concerned with the brothers' envy of Joseph, and the author briefly mentions the Joseph narrative as one biblical example of the pitfalls of jealousy (4:9).

<sup>97</sup> The date and provenance of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* is uncertain, but Joel Marcus has made a strong case for its origination in a Jewish Christian milieu during the late second to early third century in Syria, in part based on striking similarities to the *Didascalia* ("The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*: A Common Jewish Christian Milieu?," *Journal of Theological Studies* 61.2 [2010], 596-626). As Marcus points out (page 597), some scholars have suggested an Egyptian provenance based on the document's interest in Joseph, evidence which he views as unconvincing given that the narrative focuses to a greater extent on Judah and Levi. See also H. C. Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A New Translation and Introduction," in *OTP*, vol. 1, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 778.

brothers (*T. Sim.* 4:3-7; *T. Zeb.* 8:4-5).<sup>98</sup> In the *Testament of Benjamin*, Joseph is presented as an example of a “good man” who loves God and neighbor and who is rewarded by God (e.g., 3:1-8; 5:5). Developing two extrabiblical traditions about the patriarch, Joseph’s own testament portrays him as showing exemplary endurance through ten attempts of Potiphar’s wife to seduce him, which he survived unscathed (*T. Jos.* 3:1-9:5), and as showing utter humility in the face of injustice as he presents himself as a slave to the Ishmaelites in order not to embarrass his brothers (11:2-16:6). These traditions about Joseph are concerned with Joseph’s relationship to his brothers, to God, and, most of all, to righteousness – not with Joseph’s relationship to Egypt.

A. W. Argyle has shown that patristic Christian writers overwhelmingly interpreted the Joseph story as a prefiguration of the betrayal, persecution, and suffering of Christ.<sup>99</sup> For example, in *Against Marcion* (iii. 18), Tertullian writes that Joseph is a “type of Christ” on account of the patriarch’s persecution at the hands of his brothers, whom Tertullian compares to “the Jews” who persecuted Jesus (cf. *Adv. Judaeos*, 10). In *Fragment 17* of Irenaeus’s lost fragments, he states that Christ “was prefigured” in Joseph. Chrysostom draws parallels between the silence of Joseph in the face of his accusers and that of Jesus in Matt 26:51-54 (*Hom.* lxxxiv). Augustine makes an analogy

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<sup>98</sup> Hollander, “The Portrayal of Joseph,” 254-59 (quotation on page 255). The observations in this paragraph follow those of Hollander. See further Harm W. Hollander, *Joseph as an Ethical Model in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Leiden: Brill, 1981).

<sup>99</sup> A. W. Argyle, “Joseph the Patriarch in Patristic Teaching,” *The Expository Times* 67.7 (1956), 199-201. I am indebted to Argyle for the references in this paragraph. Argyle also points to the less frequent, and less uniform, usages of the Joseph story as a pattern of Christian behavior in which Christian writers variously praise Joseph’s chastity, long-suffering in the face of enmity, and forgiveness of enemies. These examples likewise do not give special attention to the narrative setting of Egypt. See also Hollander, “The Portrayal of Joseph,” 259-60.

between the Egyptians to whom Joseph “was delivered up” and the generic category of gentiles to whom Christ “was delivered up,” and yet it is another group which bears the brunt of Augustine’s rhetorical vitriol: “the Jews” whom he understands to have killed Jesus (*Quaest. in Heptat.*, cxlviii). Ambrose lays out at each point how Joseph’s story prefigures that of Christ and interprets the marriage of Joseph to Aseneth as a symbol of the marriage of Christ and the Christian church, the bride of Christ (*De Joseph Patriarcha*, 14). Joseph’s Hebrew identity vis-à-vis Egyptian culture does not appear to matter to these gentile Christians.

Origen, who was from Alexandria in Egypt, does not place significance on the narrative setting of Egypt *as Egypt*. Instead, in line with his usual mode of allegorical exegesis, he interprets Egypt figuratively. In *Genesis Homily xv*, which treats Gen 45:25-28, he understands Jacob’s pleasure that his son Joseph is not only alive but has gained “dominion over all Egypt” metaphorically:

But he is excited not only about the fact that he has heard that “Joseph his son is living,” but also especially about that which has been announced to him that it is Joseph who holds “dominion over all Egypt.” For the fact that he has reduced Egypt to his rule is truly great to him. For to tread on lust, to flee luxury, and to suppress and curb all the pleasures of the body, this is what it means to have “dominion over all Egypt.” And this is what is considered great and held in admiration by Israel.<sup>100</sup>

For Origen, Egypt as a literal geographical location bears no special significance; rather, it stands in as a symbol of “vices of the body” which must be avoided. He is much more concerned with Joseph’s triumph over his bodily desires than with the patriarch’s

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<sup>100</sup> Translations of Origen are by Ronald E. Heine (*Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* [The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, vol. 71; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982], 203-13).

relations with Egyptians as Egyptians. Just subsequently, Origen interprets Egypt figuratively again but in a different way: when God tells Jacob not to be afraid “to descend into Egypt,” he is actually referring to “principalities and powers...and rulers of this world of this darkness” (Eph 6:12). A final indication that Origen views the importance of the narrative setting in a metaphorical sense is his suggestion that “each of us also, in the same manner and in the same way, enters Egypt and struggles and, if he be worthy that God should always remain with him, he will make him into a great nation,” a nation which Origen claims is the gentile church. Thus, Origen’s telling of the Joseph story likewise does not participate in the Jewish interpretive tradition I have identified which places special significance upon Joseph’s relationship specifically to Egypt (as Egypt).

## Conclusions

While the Joseph narrative was immensely popular in Second Temple Judaism, and also drew attention from early Christians, the interpretive move of employing this character to demonstrate a right (or wrong) relationship between Hebrews/Jews and Egyptians, and their respective cultures, is unique to Jewish biblical interpreters living and writing in Greco-Roman Egypt. *Joseph and Aseneth*’s boundary-negotiation also participates in such a project, and this fact lends additional evidence to the cumulative case for understanding this narrative as a Hellenistic Jewish literary product from Egypt. As I mentioned above, an Egyptian provenance entails a *terminus ante quem* of 115-17 CE, the date of the Jewish Revolt which resulted in the devastation of Alexandria’s Jewish population. It is more likely than not, however, that the narrative was composed



before the pogroms against Jews in 38-41 CE because of its conspicuously convivial attitude toward (idol-free) gentiles.

Having presented the case for *Joseph and Aseneth*'s Jewish provenance, I turn in the next chapter to the significance of this narrative's "living God" terminology when paired with other Jewish writings from the Second Temple period which are likewise concerned with the relationship between Jews and gentiles. In Chapter Five, I set into relief the distinctive use of the epithet "(the) living God" in *Joseph and Aseneth* by comparing it to that in the book of *Jubilees*, which also rewrites Genesis and which also uses the epithet in the course of promoting a stark view of the Jew/gentile boundary, and to that in the letters of the apostle Paul, who is also concerned with gentile incorporation into Israel. I suggest that such an analysis reveals that the author of *Aseneth*'s tale is a participant in an inner-Jewish debate over the legitimacy of gentile conversion to Judaism in the Second Temple period.

CHAPTER FIVE  
INSIDERS, OUTSIDERS, AND ‘CHILDREN OF THE LIVING GOD’  
IN *JUBILEES* AND PAUL

**Introduction**

Ancient Jews disagreed about the possibility and legitimacy of gentile inclusion in Israel. Having argued that *Joseph and Aseneth* is best understood as a Jewish narrative from Hellenistic Egypt, I now situate its position toward gentiles in the broader landscape of Second Temple Judaism by comparing its use of the title “(the) living God” with that of two other Jewish writers who employ the epithet and who have strong positions on the proper relationship of Jews (and their God) to non-Jews: the author of *Jubilees* and the apostle Paul. While all three interpret “the living God” in terms of God’s role as creator, they reach different conclusions about whether and how gentile incorporation is possible.

***Jubilees* and Aseneth on Israel’s Boundaries**

For *Joseph and Aseneth*, the boundary between Jew and gentile is permeable under certain circumstances: a gentile may become a Jew *if* he or she abandons idolatry in favor of exclusive worship of Israel’s God. Other Hellenistic Jewish authors, including Philo and Josephus (whose positions I outline below), hold a similar or identical view. This possibility for Jew/gentile boundary permeability is not ubiquitous in Second Temple Judaism, however. Christine Hayes has shown that *Jubilees* denies

gentiles access to Jewish identity by taking up Ezra's "holy seed" ideology in order to define Jewishness in exclusively genealogical terms.<sup>1</sup> For the second-century BCE Palestinian author of *Jubilees*, only descendants of Jacob/Israel – those who come from his seed – are part of Israel.<sup>2</sup> Matthew Thiessen has demonstrated, moreover, that the author of *Jubilees* is part of a minority stream of tradition within Second Temple Judaism which accepted only eighth-day circumcision as legitimate; *Jubilees* would therefore reject the notion that a gentile could convert and join Israel by undergoing circumcision.<sup>3</sup> *Jubilees*' rejection of the very possibility of a gentile's becoming a Jew is important for the present project because it shows that *Joseph and Aseneth*'s positive stance toward conversion and intermarriage, while not unique, was also not inevitable. This section explicates the role of "the living God" in the book of *Jubilees* in order to set in relief *Joseph and Aseneth*'s use of the epithet. I suggest that the authors of both texts are participants in an inner-Jewish struggle over the question of gentile access to Jewish identity during the Second Temple period.

The epithet "the living God" occurs twice in *Jubilees* (1:24 and 21:4), once in the opening chapter which interprets Israel's relationship to God in the Deuteronomic paradigm of disobedience, exile as punishment, and ultimate restoration, and once in the patriarch Abraham's first-person account of his rejection of idols in favor of exclusive

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<sup>1</sup> Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 73-81.

<sup>2</sup> On the dating and provenance of *Jubilees*, see Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 73-74; and VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, 18-21. As I stated in the previous chapter, a *terminus post quem* of 175 BCE is deduced from the elements in the text which deal with live issues during the Hellenistic reform (e.g., nudity in 3:31, which I discuss below). Citations of *Jubilees* in the Damascus Document (CD 16:3-4) provide a *terminus ante quem* of 100-75 BCE.

<sup>3</sup> Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, esp. 67-86.

worship of YHWH.<sup>4</sup> Before examining each of these occurrences, I first outline two well-known characteristics of *Jubilees* which are pertinent to this discussion: (1) the overall narrative setting and strategy of *Jubilees*, and (2) the book's famously derogatory stance toward gentiles.

The book of *Jubilees*, whose literary conceit boasts its content's revelation to Moses long ago on Mt. Sinai, is a reworked elaboration and explanation of the story of God and Israel from Genesis 1 through Exodus 12. The author's interpretive technique might be usefully termed 'covenantal anachronism': *Jubilees* tells the story of the world's beginnings through the election of Israel from the perspective of the covenant backwards, highlighting the existence and relevance of *halakhah* even before the event at Sinai.<sup>5</sup> For example, Abraham is depicted observing the Feast of Tabernacles (16:20-31) long before its actual institution in the biblical narrative. As Nickelsburg comments, furthermore, the author often adds original remarks which "[utilize] some element in the biblical narrative as the basis for his exposition of a point of law."<sup>6</sup> God's covering the nakedness of Adam and Eve, for example, is the basis for the prohibition of nakedness (3:31).<sup>7</sup> I return below to this narrative strategy, since a key instance of *Jubilees*' covenantal anachronism conditions the meaning of the epithet "the living God" in this book.

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<sup>4</sup> Everding categorizes this instance of the epithet under "Idol Polemic" ("The Living God," 150).

<sup>5</sup> For discussions of this literary conceit in *Jubilees*, see Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 69-70; VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, 100-109; Wintermute, "Jubilees," 38.

<sup>6</sup> Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 70.

<sup>7</sup> Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 70.

The second feature of the book of *Jubilees* which deserves preliminary comment is its estimation of gentiles: “*le mot abhorré*.”<sup>8</sup> *Jubilees*’ disdain for non-Jews is universally recognized by scholars. Gentile behavior is the ultimate counterexample to the behavior expected of Israel. In the prohibition against nakedness mentioned above, for example, Israel is told not to be “uncovered *as the gentiles* are uncovered” (3:31; emphasis mine). Furthermore, gentiles as a category are the object of insult throughout *Jubilees*. Moyer Hubbard has helpfully collected the numerous instances in which non-Jews are represented in disparaging terms, including “children of destruction” (15:26), “children of perdition” (10:3), “sons of Beliar” (15:33-34), “the enemy” (1:19; 23:30; 24:29; 30:17), “sinners” (16:5-6), “idol worshipers” (22:22), and “the hated ones” (22:22).<sup>9</sup> As several of these epithets suggest, the interpretive paradigm which most clearly places gentiles in opposition to Israel is *Jubilees*’ conception of the gentiles as being on the side not only of sin, but also of Satan. Wintermute summarizes:

The other nations are separated from God because he has placed spirits in authority over them to lead them astray...Israel is qualitatively different from all other nations. In the context of such an understanding, the hostility between Israel and surrounding nations may be seen as a conflict between good and evil...On a theological level, we are to understand that those who do not belong to the children of the covenant belong to the children of destruction (15:26).<sup>10</sup>

The difference between Israel and others is not played out merely on a this-worldly, physical plane, but it is also active in the invisible, other-worldly spiritual plane (15:30-32). While gentiles are under the aegis of demonic spirits, Israel is conceived as having a

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<sup>8</sup> This is François Martin’s pithy distillation of *Jubilees*’ anti-gentile attitude (“Le livre des Jubilés,” *RB* 8 (1911), 528 [cited in Hubbard, *New Creation*, 41]).

<sup>9</sup> Hubbard, *New Creation*, 41.

<sup>10</sup> Wintermute, “*Jubilees*,” 48.

near angelic status.<sup>11</sup> As Kugel has written, “For *Jubilees*, Israel’s holiness means first and foremost that Israel belongs to an order of being different from the order of being of other humans so that Israel is, in effect, wholly different, the earthly correspondent to God’s heavenly hosts.”<sup>12</sup> In sum, for *Jubilees*, Israel is good and gentiles are bad.

Mixture is worse. For *Jubilees*, Israel must remain separate from the gentiles, the definitive “other” against which Israel is conceived. Abraham employs this model of binarism, for example, when he commands Jacob to have no dealings with gentiles, neither eating with them nor acting like them, for their ways are “contaminated, and despicable, and abominable” (22:16).<sup>13</sup> This strict partition also excludes sexual contact and intermarriage with gentiles (chapter 30), a prohibition to which I return below. It should be no surprise, then, that in *Jubilees* the epithet “the living God” draws boundaries between Israel and all others in a way similar to its function in the narratives of Israel’s scriptures which I examined in Chapter One.

The first instance of this epithet occurs in the book’s opening chapter, a section of material which serves as “an epitome of the book as a whole.”<sup>14</sup> It tells the story of Israel’s infidelity to the covenant and ensuing punishment by God, and it ends by anticipating eschatological renewal, when God will restore Israel and redeem the cosmos

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<sup>11</sup> On the evil spirits (which God permits to exist) in *Jubilees*, see VanderKam, 127-29.

<sup>12</sup> James Kugel, “The Holiness of Israel and the Land in Second Temple Times,” in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, eds. Michael V. Fox, Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, Avi Huvitz, Michael L. Klein, Baruch J. Schwartz, and Nili Shupak (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbraun, 1996), 27.

<sup>13</sup> Hayes is right to note the irony that while Abraham is “the progenitor of diverse peoples” in *Jubilees* (see 16:17), he is also “the original champion of strict endogamy” and “the earliest separatist” (*Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 80).

<sup>14</sup> Hubbard, *New Creation*, 36.

through an act of “new creation” (1:29; cf. 4:26; 23:11-32). The epithet, which appears in the Hosean construction “children of the living God,” is part of the depiction of this final movement of renewal.<sup>15</sup> God tells Moses that he will ultimately restore Israel’s covenantal status (1:22-25) after Israel has “[walked] after the gentiles” and served their idols (1:7-11), and after God has given them up to “the power of the nations to be captive, and for plunder, and to be devoured” (1:13).<sup>16</sup> Moses intercedes on Israel’s behalf (1:19-21) and then learns that Israel’s subjugation to the gentiles will not last forever. God will purify them, and they will obey the commandments once again (1:23-24):

But after this they will return to me in all [uprightness] and with all of (their) heart and soul. And I shall cut off the foreskin of their heart and the foreskin of the heart of their descendants. And I shall create for them a holy spirit, and I shall purify them so that they will not turn away from following me from that day and forever. And their souls will cleave to me and to all my commandments. And they will do my commandments. And I shall be a father to them, and they will be sons to me. And they will all be called “sons of the living God.”

As Goodwin argues, the epithet here signifies the close covenantal relationship between YHWH and the chosen people, who are here deemed God’s children (literally, “sons”).<sup>17</sup> The sonship motif does more than merely identify Israel, however. It also sets the stage for *Jubilees*’ opposition of (restored) Israel – the “children of the living God” – to

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<sup>15</sup> Everding, “The Living God,” 153-55. Everding understands *Jubilees*’ uses of the epithet as conservative rather than constructive, meaning that the author of *Jubilees* adopts the epithet’s meaning from Israel’s scriptures rather than adapts it for new purposes. Everding does not comment on the epithet’s initial association with “new creation,” and he denies that *Jubilees* makes any connection between the epithet and God’s role as creator (“The Living God,” 151-53), an interpretation which I counter in this section.

<sup>16</sup> Translations of *Jubilees* are from Wintermute, “Jubilees.”

<sup>17</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 46-50. In his study of the epithet, Goodwin acknowledges but does not examine its appearance in *Jub.* 21:4.

gentiles, who are “children of destruction” (15:26), “children of perdition” (10:3), and “sons of Beliar” (15:33-34). The sonship motif in combination with the epithet thus constructs a discursive boundary between Israel and “other.” Furthermore, Israel’s status as “children of the living God” is part of the eschatological solution to two interrelated problems: (1) Israel’s imitating the nations by worshiping their idols, and (2) Israel’s being subject to the gentile nations as a result of this idol worship.<sup>18</sup> The epithet in 1:24 signifies, then, not only the restoration of Israel’s covenant, but also the hoped-for separation of Israel from gentile idols, gentile practices, and gentile power.

As already mentioned, the expected solution which this usage of the epithet advances is articulated in terms of “the day of new creation,” a future time when “heaven and earth and all of their creatures shall be renewed according to the powers of heaven” (1:29).<sup>19</sup> As Hubbard points out, in more instances than not, the author of *Jubilees* uses language of destruction to depict the fate of gentiles when God finally restores Israel.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> I follow Hubbard’s logic (*New Creation*, 36) that the significance of the solution is best illumined by first understanding the problem (i.e., what the solution is conceived to solve). He credits Michael E. Stone for this methodological strategy (“Lists of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature,” in *Selected Studies in the Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha* [Leiden: Brill, 1991], 446). Hubbard rightly identifies “sin, Satan, and the Gentiles” as the three major problems throughout the book of *Jubilees* (*New Creation*, 38-43), yet, I contend, in this programmatic opening chapter, the problem is not gentiles *per se*. The problem is that Israel *acted* like gentiles by worshiping their idols and then was made subject to gentiles as divine punishment. The restoration of Israel therefore addresses two separate issues: Israel’s covenantal infidelity, which made them analogous to gentiles, and the resulting subjugation of Israel to gentile nations. The identification of Israel as the children of “the living God” is part of the eschatological solution to the perceived problem of Israel’s being mixed up with the nations, subject to their power as punishment for worshiping their idols.

<sup>19</sup> On the topic of the “new creation” motif in *Jubilees*, see also T. Ryan Jackson, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters: A Study of the Historical and Social Setting of a Pauline Concept* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 46-52. The major disagreement of these two scholars centers on the principal meaning of “new creation” for Paul, whether the apostle’s use of the motif is primarily anthropological (so Hubbard) or cosmological as well (so Jackson).

<sup>20</sup> Hubbard, *New Creation*, 42.



Non-Jews will be “destroyed and annihilated from the earth and uprooted from the earth” (15:26; see also 15:26, 34; 20:4; 22:20; 24:30-32; 26:34; 31:17, 19-20). Thus, the “living God” in the opening chapter of *Jubilees* is the covenantal God of Israel who will save the chosen people both from their behaving like gentiles and from being subjugated to gentiles when the whole cosmos is created anew, initiating “an eschaton that [is] entirely Gentile-free” (see 22:22).<sup>21</sup>

The second occurrence of the epithet in *Jubilees* explicitly links “the living God” with God’s creative capacity. Abraham uses the divine title in his dying words to Isaac as he recalls his own rejection of idols:

Behold I am one hundred and seventy-five years old, and throughout all of the days of my life I have been remembering the Lord and sought with all my heart to do his will and walk uprightly in all his ways. I hated idols, and those who serve them I have rejected. And I have offered my heart and spirit so that I might be careful to do the will of the one who created me because he is the living God (21:2-4).

There are two important contextual features here which point to the epithet’s function as a boundary marker. First, Abraham understands his God, “the living God,” in opposition to idols *and* to those who serve them. That is, for Abraham, the rejection of idols entails the rejection of idolaters – a point consistent with the material peppered throughout *Jubilees* warning the patriarchs and their descendants against both idolatry and gentiles. Secondly, Abraham identifies this “living God” as the creator God. On the surface, this identification does not appear to instantiate a boundary. Yet, God’s position as creator in the wider narrative of *Jubilees* is used to call attention to Israel’s exceptional status among the nations. The author retrojects Israel’s election into a retelling of Genesis 1-2.

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<sup>21</sup> Hubbard, *New Creation*, 43. Cf. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, 134.

God elects Israel on the seventh day of creation and commands them to be separate from the nations from that day forward:

Behold I [God] shall separate for myself a people from all the nations. And they will also keep the Sabbath. And I will sanctify them for myself, and I will bless them. Just as I have sanctified and shall sanctify the Sabbath day for myself thus shall I bless them. And they will be my people and I will be their God. And I have chosen the seed of Jacob from among all that I have seen (2:19-20).

As Kugel writes, “God’s choice of Israel as His people was moved back from Exodus 19 to the seventh day of the creation,” thereby communicating an in-group message to present-day Jews who count as part of Jacob’s seed: “We were God’s people long before the Sinai covenant, we worshiped Him back then in the same way that we worship Him now, and we will remain His people forever.”<sup>22</sup> For *Jubilees*, Israel’s divinely-mandated separation from the nations is written into the very fabric of the cosmos.

God’s identification as creator is not, however, relegated only to the opening creation narratives. It permeates *Jubilees*. Even the chief demonic spirit Mastema addresses God as “Creator” (10:7). Moreover, for *Jubilees*, God is not merely the creator; God is the universal creator of *all*. During a discourse on the meaning of Sabbath, for example, the narrator describes God as “the one who created all things” (2:21) and twice as “the Creator of all” (2:31, 32). Abraham is depicted as rejecting his father’s idols and worshiping “the Creator of all” (11:17). As Abraham pleads with his father to do likewise, he describes God in terms of the deity’s creative capacity:

Worship the God of heaven,  
Who sends down rain and dew upon the earth,

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<sup>22</sup> Kugel, “The Holiness of Israel,” 7-8. VanderKam makes a similar point when he writes that “*Jubilees* emphasizes the relationship between God and Israel by tracing it back to creation” (*The Book of Jubilees*, 122).

and who makes everything upon the earth,  
and created everything by his word,  
and all life in his presence... (12:4).

In a subsequent prayer, after Abraham has burned his father's idols (12:12), he addresses

God as creator:

My God, the Most High God, you alone are God to me.  
And you created everything,  
and everything which is was the work of your hands... (12:19).

When the narrator describes God's knowledge of Abraham's future as the father of a  
righteous nation, the language depicts God as creator:

And he [Abraham] blessed *his Creator* who *created him* in his generation because  
by his will *he created him* for he knew and he perceived that from him there  
would be a righteous planting for eternal generations and a holy seed from him so  
that he might be like *the one who made everything* (16:26; emphasis mine).

When Abraham later gives thanks to God for keeping the promise of progeny (in this  
case, Isaac), "he blessed the Creator of all with his eloquence" (17:3).

God's identity as creator is emphasized especially during Abraham's deathbed  
sequence. In the first instance, Rebecca has sent via Jacob some grain cakes "so that  
[Abraham] might eat and bless the Creator of all before he died" (22:4). Isaac follows  
suit, likewise sending Abraham an offering (22:5). The narrator then reports that  
Abraham "ate and drank and blessed God Most High *who created heaven and earth* and  
*who made all the fat of the earth* and gave it to the sons of man so that they might eat and  
drink and bless *their Creator*" (22:6; emphasis mine). When Abraham blesses Jacob just  
prior to his own death, he identifies the God who called him "out from Ur of the  
Chaldees" as "the God of all, and Creator of all" (22:27).

Jacob is the audience for several more occasions on which God is similarly identified. When Rebecca later offers Jacob a blessing, she addresses “the Most High God who created heaven and earth” (25:11). When it is Isaac’s turn to bless his son, he calls God “the one who created everything” (31:29). God self-identifies as universal creator during the vision scene in which Jacob receives “Israel” as his new name: God begins the promise of blessings for Jacob by proclaiming, “I am the Lord who created heaven and earth” (32:18). Finally, when Isaac is on his deathbed, he swears an oath to Jacob and Esau by “the glorious and honored and great and splendid and amazing and mighty name *which created heaven and earth and everything together*” (36:7; emphasis mine). Indeed, for *Jubilees*, “the living God” is the creator of all.

With this motif, *Jubilees* provides a useful counterpoint to *Joseph and Aseneth*, which also casts Israel’s “living God” as universal creator.<sup>23</sup> Whereas in *Joseph and Aseneth*, God’s position as creator of all is a theological justification for the possibility of gentile conversion and intermarriage (which I argued in Chapter Three), *Jubilees* casts God as universal creator in order to emphasize the boundaries between Israel and other nations. Israel’s exclusivity is made explicit when *Jubilees* 2:31 reports that “[t]he Creator of all blessed [the sabbath], but he did not sanctify any people or nations to keep

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. *1 Enoch* 5:1, which also associates God’s status as “living” with the deity’s position as creator: “Observe how the verdant trees are covered with leaves and they bear fruit. Pay attention concerning all things and know in what manner he fashioned them. All of them belong to him who lives forever” (translation by E. Isaac, “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *OTP*, Vol. 1, ed. James H. Charlesworth [New York: Doubleday, 1983], 5-89).

the sabbath with the sole exception of Israel” (2:31).<sup>24</sup> To put the point another way: *even though* God created “all,” God elected only Israel.<sup>25</sup> Israel’s distinctiveness from the nations from the very beginning is highlighted later in the narrative when Hebrew, the language of Israel, is identified as “the tongue of creation” (12:26). Moreover, according to *Jubilees*, “all [nations] belong to [God],” but Israel is the only nation whom God spared from being led away by spirits (15:31). Thus, despite the fact that God created all, only one nation is chosen, and that nation is the seed of Jacob, a nation who is to remain utterly separate from all others. In *Joseph and Aseneth*, God’s identity as creator of all means that God may re-create gentile Aseneth into an acceptable convert and marriage partner for a Hebrew patriarch (see Chapter Three). The creation motif is used to challenge the ethnic bounds of Israel’s identity. The book of *Jubilees*, on the other hand,

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<sup>24</sup> Kugel has suggested that *Jubilees*’ insertion of the command for Israel to observe the Sabbath into the middle of the creation narrative is an attempt to answer an “old and thorny exegetical problem,” which he articulates in this way: “if the Sabbath as a phenomenon was embodied in the very creation of the universe, then why was it not enjoined upon *all* peoples?” (“The Holiness of Israel,” 25). This question, even apart from the answer (which, for *Jubilees*, is that Sabbath is a heavenly institution in which Israel, as a holy – indeed, almost angelic – nation, participates), points to the crux of the issue I explore in this section: the implications for non-Israelites that Israel’s God is their creator too.

<sup>25</sup> On *Jubilees*’ concept of election as emphatically applied to “all Israel” (and only Israel), see Todd R. Hanneken, *The Subversion of the Apocalypses in the Book of Jubilees* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 97-104. Hanneken writes that *Jubilees* “emphasizes that the category ‘Israel’ has singular and eternal significance in the classification of humanity” (*The Subversion of the Apocalypses*, 99). Such an emphasis makes *Jubilees* distinctive from contemporary apocalypses which “consistently qualify or reject the significance of the category ‘Israel’” (*The Subversion of the Apocalypses*, 104).

retells Genesis 1-2 as a means of highlighting the exclusivity of Israel's relationship to the creator God.<sup>26</sup>

Such exclusivity eliminates any possibility of gentile inclusion. As Hayes has shown, *Jubilees* understands Israelites and gentiles as two distinct "seeds" (*Jub.* 16:17-18).<sup>27</sup> Israelite seed is holy, while gentile seed is profane. For *Jubilees*, the two should not be intermingled since admixture results in an unacceptable genealogical impurity in Israel's seed.<sup>28</sup> Interethnic sexual union between Israel and gentiles is therefore unacceptable.<sup>29</sup> As Hayes points out, *Jubilees* is not singular in its prohibition of intermarriage. Yet, she argues, many others who prohibit interethnic unions do not proscribe marriage between Jews and *converted* gentiles (e.g., gentiles who have gained access to Jewish religious identity through forsaking idols).<sup>30</sup> Philo, for example, draws on Deuteronomy's rationale for the ban of interethnic union, which is based on the possibility that the Israelite partner might stray from God through exposure to the practices of the non-Israelite partner: "But also, he [Moses] says, do not enter into the

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<sup>26</sup> The question of why God would create a world full of peoples and then elect only one of them is apparently of no concern to the author of *Jubilees*. The emphasis on Israel's covenantal relationship with God is likely the author's response to Hellenizing reforms among Jews in Palestine who, as depicted in 1 Maccabees, wanted to integrate with Hellenistic society and non-Jewish culture rather than remain distinctive from it. *Jubilees* insists that Jews should remain separate from non-Jews because such separation is part of way the one sovereign God arranged the universe. See VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, 139-41.

<sup>27</sup> Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 75.

<sup>28</sup> Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 75.

<sup>29</sup> Kugel puts it this way: "The holy seed cannot be sown among other nations; it is not a question of learning their evil ways, but of mixing unlike substances" ("The Holiness of Israel," 27).

<sup>30</sup> Hayes, *Gentiles Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 70-71. On the topic of the development of the intermarriage ban in Second Temple Judaism and its relation to the Pentateuch, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, "From the Bible to the Talmud: The Prohibition of Intermarriage," *Hebrew Annual Review* 7 (1983), 23-39.

partnership of marriage with a member of a foreign nation, lest some day conquered by the forces of opposing customs you surrender and stray unawares from the path that leads to piety and turn aside into a pathless wild” (*Special Laws* 3:29a; Colson trans.). Philo continues by claiming that even if the Israelite partner manages to avoid such straying, the marriage might cause the children of the Israelite to falter:

And though perhaps you yourself will hold your ground steadied from your earliest years by the admirable instructions instilled into you by your parents, with the holy laws always as their key-note, there is much to be feared for your sons and daughters. It may well be that they, enticed by spurious customs which they prefer to the genuine, are likely to unlearn the honour due to the one God, and that is the first and last stage of supreme misery (*Special Laws* 3:29a; Colson trans.).

Josephus says that Moses warned the Hebrews “against marrying women of other countries” because the Israelite partner “might be entangled with foreign customs and fall away from those of the fathers” (*Jewish Antiquities* 8:191-93). Both Philo and Josephus understand the ban on intermarriage as intended to prevent a “slippery slope” down which a Jew might marry the other, act like the other, and ultimately worship something which is other than the one God (i.e., idols). It stands to reason, then, that if the gentile partner stops worshiping idols, the danger inherent to intermarriage dissipates. Marriages between Jews and ethnic non-Jews were thus allowed if the non-Jew eschewed idols in favor of exclusive worship of YHWH, since in that circumstance the gentile partner’s religious practices were no longer a potential threat to the Jewish partner.<sup>31</sup>

Hayes’ book does not mention *Joseph and Aseneth*, but it is clear that this narrative shares the conclusion of Philo and Josephus: a gentile may marry a Jew if the

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<sup>31</sup> This allowance applies only to ordinary, non-priestly Jews, since priests were considered to have holy seed which could not be mixed with the profane seed of gentiles, even those who converted. On this, see Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, esp. 71-72.

gentile turns from idols to worship YHWH alone (see Chapter Three).<sup>32</sup> Hayes argues that it is this practice – marriage to converts – against which *Jubilees*' ban on intermarriage polemicizes. This is especially evident in the retelling of Dinah's rape from Genesis 34 in *Jubilees* 30.<sup>33</sup> The narrator interrupts the story to say that the result of interethnic sexual union is death:

And if there is any man in Israel who wishes to give his daughter or his sister to any man who is from the seed of the gentiles, let him surely die, and let him be stoned because he has caused shame in Israel. And also the woman will be burned with fire because she has defiled the name of her father's house and so she will be uprooted from Israel (*Jub.* 30:7).

The storyline of *Jubilees*' reinterpretation of this tale is consistent with the book's insistence on the absolute separation of Israel from other. Two important details stand out. First, as Endres has shown, *Jubilees* omits the circumcision of the Shechemite males, which in the biblical narrative, is (at least ostensibly) intended to be a prerequisite for marrying Dinah and a precursor to more marriages between the Israelites and the Shechemites (Gen 34:14-17).<sup>34</sup> If it had not been forestalled by the bloody revenge wrought by Dinah's brothers, Shechem's marriage to Dinah would have satisfied the legal statute in Deut 22:28, which says that marriage must follow rape. While the biblical narrative momentarily accepts the (hypothetical, as it turns out) option of Shechem as a suitable marriage partner for Dinah because of the rite of circumcision, *Jubilees* disallows such a judgment of Shechem by eliminating even the *possibility* of his becoming

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<sup>32</sup> As I mentioned in Chapter Four, it is curious that *Jubilees* reports Joseph's marriage to Aseneth without comment (34:20; 40:10), given the narrative's disapproval of intermarriage.

<sup>33</sup> Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 75-76.

<sup>34</sup> Endres, *Biblical Interpretation*, 129; cf. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 77.



marriage material for an Israelite. As Hayes writes, for *Jubilees*, there is “no way properly to contract marriage with a Gentile, even when a sexual act appears to have created a legal obligation for marriage and even when the Gentile partner is willing to undergo circumcision and join the Israelite community.”<sup>35</sup>

The author of *Jubilees* thus uses the story of Dinah’s rape to communicate a stringent rejection of the possibility of both conversion and intermarriage. Here *Jubilees* provides an instructive counterpoint once again to *Joseph and Aseneth*, since Part Two of the latter work is also a retelling of Genesis 34.<sup>36</sup> Yet, whereas Dinah is the female victim in the biblical narrative and the brothers’ swordsmanship is featured (though approached with ambivalence), in *Joseph and Aseneth*, the title heroine stands in for Dinah as the woman pursued and God intervenes in a dramatic way to ensure that the brothers’ swords are not used.<sup>37</sup> The more stark contrast, however, is between the *use* of the Genesis 34 narrative in *Jubilees* and *Joseph and Aseneth*. I have already pointed out (Chapter Three) that Part Two of *Joseph and Aseneth* functions to demonstrate the full incorporation of Aseneth into Israel by her actions’ mirroring those of God (and God’s proxy, the angelic visitor). In sum, Aseneth received life in Part One of her tale, and she offers/preserves life in Part Two. She received mercy in Part One; she shows mercy in

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<sup>35</sup> Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 77.

<sup>36</sup> Angela Standhartinger, “‘Um zu sehen die Töchter des Landes’: Die Perspektive Dinas in den jüdisch-hellenistischen Auslegungen von Gen 34,” in *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in New Testament World: Essays Honoring Dieter Georgi*, eds. Lukas Bormann, Kelly Del Tredici and Angela Standhartinger (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 109-112.

<sup>37</sup> Zerbe does not mention the affinities to Genesis 34, but his treatment of violence and non-violence in Part Two of *Joseph and Aseneth* remains the most thorough treatment of this narrative’s ethic of non-retaliation (*Non-Retaliation*, 72-97).

Part Two.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, as I pointed out, Aseneth is the *only* character whose actions without question parallel those of God (and the heavenly man) in the narrative.<sup>39</sup>

Aseneth demonstrates her full incorporation into the family of Israel by mediating God's mercy to sinful Israelites through interceding on their behalf to save their lives.<sup>40</sup> Thus, *Joseph and Aseneth's* retelling of Genesis 34 functions in a way that is polar opposite to that of *Jubilees*: whereas *Jubilees* uses Dinah's story to support its polemic against marriage with converts in order to maintain the genealogical purity of Israel, *Joseph and Aseneth's* version celebrates the converted Egyptian bride of Joseph and thereby affirms a permeable border around Israel by accepting the possibility of conversion (and marriage with converts).<sup>41</sup>

In sum, the author of *Jubilees* anticipates an eschatological new creation in which Israel (ethnically conceived) is restored as "children of the living God," a time when they will be utterly separate from gentiles, even from those who would attempt to join Israel

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<sup>38</sup> Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis," 153-57. Using Burchard's reconstruction, Portier-Young demonstrates in detail the verbal and thematic parallels between God's showing mercy and Aseneth's showing mercy, and between the errant brothers in Part Two and the bees (and Aseneth's former idolatrous self) in Part One (see esp. pages 155-57).

<sup>39</sup> Levi comes close, but even he boasts about avenging his sister by slaughtering the Shechemites (Bu 23.14/Ph 23.13).

<sup>40</sup> I use the language of "family" here with emphasis, since, as I argued in Chapter Three, both families of the earliest witnesses of *Joseph and Aseneth* conceive of Aseneth's new life as leading to new kinship ties. She moves from (1) daughter of Egyptian priest Pentephres, to (2) orphan, to (3) bride of Joseph and daughter of Joseph's God.

<sup>41</sup> In this way, *Joseph and Aseneth* goes even further than other Second Temple Jewish retellings of Genesis 34, such as that of Theodotus and the *Testament of Levi*, which do allow for the prospect of Dinah's marriage to Shechem after his circumcision and therefore accept the possibility of marriage between an Israelite (or Jew) and a convert. That is, *Joseph and Aseneth* does not merely accept the (hypothetical) possibility; it provides a sympathetic narrative portrayal of just such a converted marriage partner. On the interpretation of Genesis 34 in Theodotus and the *Testament of Levi*, see James Kugel, "The Story of Dinah in the *Testament of Levi*," *HTR* 85 (1992), 1-34; cf. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 78.

through conversion and intermarriage. *Jubilees* employs language throughout which conceives of this “living God” in terms of God’s role as original, universal creator. Yet, for *Jubilees*, unlike for *Joseph and Aseneth*, God’s identity as creator of all, including gentiles, does not erase the need for the separation of Israel from the nations. Rather, both the original creation and the imagined future creative activity of God highlight Israel’s exclusivity vis-à-vis gentiles. Thus, whereas the logic in *Joseph and Aseneth* is that it is *because* of God’s position as universal creator that God can (and will) re-create a repentant gentile (who may, as a result, be incorporated into Israel), the logic in *Jubilees* is that *even though* God is the creator of all, God chose only Israel, defined strictly in ethnic terms. *Joseph and Aseneth* uses the creation motif to provide biblical warrant for gentile conversion and intermarriage; *Jubilees* does so to provide biblical warrant for the exclusivity of Israel, for the impossibility of mixing with gentiles. *Joseph and Aseneth* thereby employs the epithet to undermine a boundary; *Jubilees* does so to underscore that very boundary.

### **Paul and Aseneth on Gentile Incorporation into Israel**

Yet another ancient author who uses the epithet in the course of articulating his view of gentiles vis-à-vis Israel and Israel’s God is the apostle Paul. In 1 Thess 1:9-10, for example, Paul says that his addressees “have turned (ἐπεστρέψατε) towards God from

idols to serve a living and true God (θεῶν ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ).”<sup>42</sup> Paul here draws on the existing Jewish tradition of using the epithet in polemical opposition to idols (as in, for example, Bel and the Dragon TH, addressed in Chapter Two) as he articulates the conversion of pagans into God-worshippers. Israel’s singular God – the only “living God” – is implicitly claimed to be superior to false gods, that is, inert and impotent idols. This use of “living God” terminology confirms that Paul’s proclamation to gentiles is not *solely* focused on the risen Christ. The apostle also preaches monotheism: his converts are required to worship Israel’s God alone (cf. 1 Cor 8:4-6; Rom 1:18-25).<sup>43</sup> Paul’s pagan converts have, like Aseneth, abandoned lifeless idols in favor of exclusive worship of Israel’s God, the God who lives.

Of all the narratives examined in this dissertation so far, *Joseph and Aseneth* is the most optimistic about the relationship of Israel’s “living God” to gentiles. But as 1 Thess 1:9-10 evinces, Aseneth’s tale is not the only ancient text whose author acclaims gentiles’ turning to God from idols and finding a warm reception. This section suggests that a comparison of “living God” terminology in *Joseph and Aseneth* and in Paul’s writings, particularly the letter to the Romans, is mutually illuminating. I demonstrate

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<sup>42</sup> As Morna Hooker has pointed out, ever since Adolf von Harnack suggested that 1 Thess 1:9b-10 represents “mission-preaching to pagans in a nutshell” (*The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. [Williams & Norgate, 1924], 1:89), this judgment has become “one of the axioms of New Testament scholarship” (“1 Thessalonians 1.9-10: a Nutshell – but What Kind of Nut?,” in *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion*, eds. H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger and P. Schäfer, vol. 3 [Tübingen: Mohr, 1996], 435). Hooker surveys the evidence for this reading and argues that the passage instead encapsulates Paul’s ensuing argument in the letter (“1 Thessalonians 1.9-10: a Nutshell,” 435-48). What is most important for my purposes is the basic idea that Paul requires his pagan converts (in Thessalonica and beyond) to worship YHWH alone.

<sup>43</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 127-32; Paula Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations,” 232-52.

first that *Joseph and Aseneth*'s "living God" theology is a useful analogue for clarifying Paul's theology of conversion. I then suggest that Paul's mode of imagining gentile incorporation helps articulate a discursive goal of *Joseph and Aseneth*, which is to provide a myth of origins for gentile inclusion in Israel.

First, a methodological note is in order. The author of *Aseneth*'s tale and the apostle Paul are divided in significant ways. If *Aseneth*'s story is indeed of Egyptian provenance (see Chapter Four), these two writers are separated geographically. There are also important ideological differences. It is clear that the death and resurrection of the Christ is central to Paul's understanding of God's present work. The apostle, moreover, expects an imminent eschaton. Neither is apparently true for the author of *Joseph and Aseneth*. (The narrative's setting in the patriarchal period would make such beliefs difficult to identify, though early Christians often did interpret the Joseph story with language which made their belief in Christ explicit [see Chapter Four].) Finally, while it is possible that Paul and the author of *Aseneth*'s tale are chronological contemporaries, the uncertainty of the latter's date, along with the fact that *Joseph and Aseneth* exists in multiple versions, makes it unwise to build an argument which assumes a common time period any more specific than the two centuries surrounding the turn of the era.<sup>44</sup> For these reasons, I do not posit direct lines of influence in either direction. It is more likely that the overlaps I identify in subsequent paragraphs are the result of these authors'

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<sup>44</sup> As I mentioned in Chapter Four, the earliest date *Joseph and Aseneth* could have been composed is 100 BCE because of the author's familiarity with the Greek translations of Israel's scriptures. I argued there that *Joseph and Aseneth* is most likely a Jewish literary product from Greco-Roman Egypt. Since the Jewish communities in Alexandria were devastated in the revolt of 115-17 CE, this is the latest date an Egyptian provenance can support. In my judgment, it is more likely than not that the narrative was composed before the pogroms against Jews in 38-41 CE, given its welcoming stance toward gentiles (minus their idols).

general commonalities, for they share a fierce devotion to the God of Israel, a polemical stance toward idolatry, an intimate knowledge of Israel's scriptures, and a conviction that it is possible for gentiles somehow to gain access to the people of God. It is in the unraveling of the "somehow," I suggest below, where their patterns of thinking and modes of argumentation are intriguingly parallel.

Like *Joseph and Aseneth*, Paul employs the epithet in a comment on the relationship between Israel's God and converted pagans. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle writes, "As also he [God] says in Hosea, 'I will call him who was not my people "my people" and her who was not beloved, "beloved." And it will be that in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," there they will be called "children of the living God (υἱοὶ θεοῦ ζώντος)'" (Rom 9:25-26; cf. Hos 2:25 and 2:1 OG).<sup>45</sup> Paul does not elaborate here on the relationship of "the living God" to gentiles, which is unsurprising given that these verses are part of a larger argument in Romans 9-11 about God's faithfulness to Israel.<sup>46</sup> Despite this fact, Mark Goodwin has attempted to articulate a synthetic Pauline theology of conversion by focusing on Paul's "living God"

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<sup>45</sup> This use of Hosea in Rom 9:25-26 is part of a pattern in the Pauline corpus where the apostle (or, in the case of Ephesians, a Pauline disciple) applies to gentiles prophecies which originally referred to Israelite/Judahite exiles (Gal 4:27; 2 Cor 6:16-18, in which the epithet makes an appearance: "we are the temple of the living God" [discussed below]; and Eph 2:17). On this pattern, see David Starling, *Not My People: Gentiles as Exiles in Pauline Hermeneutics* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011]). Starling mentions *Joseph and Aseneth* in his discussion of Rom 9:25-26 (*Not My People*, 129-31) but does not register the significant intersections I outline in this chapter.

<sup>46</sup> Heikki Räisänen, "Paul, God, and Israel: Romans 9-11 in Recent Research," in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Tribute to Howard Clarke Kee* (eds. Jacob Neusner, Peder Borgen, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Richard Horsley [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988], 178 [emphasis original]). Nils Alstrup Dahl suggests that the apostle's argument in Romans 9-11 explains what is meant by "to the Jew first" in the thesis statement of Rom 1:16, where Paul writes that the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (*Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977], 139.)

terminology.<sup>47</sup> He argues that Paul views gentile conversion as “a life-giving act which recreates Gentiles out of their non-existent state into children of the living God.”<sup>48</sup> The apostle, Goodwin claims, views gentile conversion “on analogy with God creating the world and raising the dead to life.”<sup>49</sup>

Goodwin collects four pieces of evidence from Romans in support of this argument: (1) Paul’s discussion of God as universal creator in 1:18-25, (2) the divine potter motif in 9:20-23, in which a creative God refashions a vessel, (3) the call motif in 9:24-26, which reflects the ancient Jewish notion that God created the world by calling it into being, and finally (4) Paul’s assertion in 4:17 that God is the one who “gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist,” which Goodwin says mirrors the claim in 9:25-26 that God has called those who are “not my people” to become “children of the living God.”<sup>50</sup> On their own, none of these pieces of evidence shows with certainty that Paul views the role of “the living God” in terms of God’s (re)creative, life-giving capacity. Cumulatively, they are suggestive.

Given the genre of Paul’s writings – epistles targeted at specific audiences in particularized times and places – the modern interpreter’s task of combining disparate bits and pieces of Paul’s thinking into a coherent logic is challenging. It would certainly

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<sup>47</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*.

<sup>48</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 150.

<sup>49</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 157.

<sup>50</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 130-31, 150-60. Goodwin also points to his survey of “living God” terminology in Hellenistic Judaism as evidence that Paul conceived of “the living God” as the creator God, but, as I have shown (Chapter Two), this interpretation of “the living God” was not universal among Hellenistic Jews and so cannot be used as such to fill in the blanks of Paul’s theology.

be easier if Paul had given a more straightforward narrative account which depicts God's activity in the transformation of a convert. He did not. As I have shown, the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* did. In fact, the conversion theology of *Joseph and Aseneth* which I have outlined in this dissertation is identical to Paul's as Goodwin conceives it: Israel's "living God" is the creator of all who can therefore give life to all, including gentiles who turn from idols and devote themselves to this "living God" exclusively. This theology is much more developed – and, I would say, apparent – in *Joseph and Aseneth* than in Paul's terse (and dispersed) formulation.

Goodwin has not entirely overlooked the evidence of *Joseph and Aseneth*. He suggests that Paul in Rom 9:25-26 is drawing on a "Jewish background" which provides precedent for the association of Hosea's prophecy in 2:1 OG with gentile conversion to Judaism.<sup>51</sup> He posits that the link was already a live association at the time Paul was writing:

Paul...can apply Hos 2:1 LXX to Gentile converts with no explanation or clarification because the application was already familiar. Paul operates with a precedent that links Hos 2:1 LXX with Gentile converts and can thus assume his reader's familiarity with this association.<sup>52</sup>

Other interpreters disagree, believing that Paul's application of "children of the living God" to gentiles would have been novel, even scandalous. Ross Wagner, for example, understands Paul's reversal motif here as "surprising."<sup>53</sup> Richard Hays calls Paul's

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<sup>51</sup> I return in the Conclusion to the faulty assumptions inherent in the phrase "Jewish background" in this context.

<sup>52</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 153.

<sup>53</sup> J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul 'in Concert' in the Letter to the Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 83.



interpretation of Hosea's prophecy a "hermeneutical coup" which is "so smoothly executed that Gentile Christian readers might miss its innovative boldness – and therefore its potential scandal to Jewish readers."<sup>54</sup> Steve Moyise has rejected Goodwin's argument outright:

I believe that Mark Goodwin is mistaken in trying to find a precedent for [the link of Hos 2:1 LXX to gentile conversion] in contemporary Judaism...The evidence that Goodwin offers is the fact that the term 'living God' occurs in a number of texts connected with idol polemic (e.g., LXX Dan 5:23, 6:10). From this he deduces that the identification of Hosea's 'not my people' with Gentiles was common in Paul's day. However, there is no evidence that anyone before Paul had interpreted Hos 1:10 and 2:23 in this manner, and it is pure speculation to say that such an identification was "already familiar."<sup>55</sup>

Moyise does not acknowledge that Goodwin also mentions *Jos. Asen.* 19:8 (in Burchard's reconstruction), which is the strongest evidence for his claim that Paul's use of the Hosean phrase "children of the living God" as a reference to gentile converts is not unique. Goodwin makes this point almost in passing, however, and his limited treatment of *Joseph and Aseneth* leads him to neglect the more fundamental overlaps in their thinking to which I pointed above.

Perhaps the most significant parallel between Paul and *Joseph and Aseneth*, however, is that "living God" terminology/theology advances for each a comparable rhetorical goal: both authors want to incorporate at least one (idol-free) gentile into the people of God. Paul's quotation of Hos 2:25 and 2:1 OG in Rom 9:25-26 is widely understood to be the apostle's scriptural justification for his claim in verse 24 that God

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<sup>54</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 67.

<sup>55</sup> Steve Moyise, "Latency and Respect for Context: A Response to Mitchell Kim," in *Paul and Scripture: Extending the Conversation*, ed. Christopher D. Stanley (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 133.

has called gentiles to be part of the people of God.<sup>56</sup> Paul applies Hosea’s phrase “children of the living God” to gentile converts as a means of providing biblical justification for the idea that those “whom [God] called” are “not only from the Jews *but also from the gentiles*” (9:24). I argued in Chapter Three that *Joseph and Aseneth* uses “living God” terminology to depict Israel’s God in such a way as to allow for, and even embrace, gentile conversion and inclusion in the people of Israel. Both authors, then, use “living God” terminology to depict the God of Israel as the creator of all who can give new life to all, including gentiles who worship this God exclusively; both authors do so, furthermore, in order to offer a biblical explanation for gentile conversion. I propose that this similarity is grounds for exploring an additional commonality: their rewriting of characters from Israel’s scriptures as a means of providing a “myth of origins” for gentile inclusion in YHWH’s people. Paul uses Abraham; *Joseph and Aseneth* uses Aseneth.

Indeed, according to Paul, “the living God” is not the only one whose paternity is now accessible to gentiles. The apostle also conceives of gentiles in Christ as (spiritual) descendants of Israel’s patriarch Abraham. In Galatians 3:6-9, Paul refers to gentiles in the Jesus movement as Abraham’s sons, citing Gen 15:6 in combination with Gen 22:18 as evidence that God always intended to include gentiles in the blessings promised to Abraham:

Just as Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, you see, so then those who are of faith, these are sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that out of faith [or faithfulness] God would justify the gentiles,

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<sup>56</sup> See as examples C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 2:499, 501; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. G. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 274; Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (EEK NT VI.2; 3 vols.; Neukirchener: Benziger, 1987), 2:206; and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 573. Goodwin also makes this observation (*Paul, Apostle of the Living God*), 152.

proclaimed the gospel beforehand to Abraham that “in you all the nations will be blessed.”

In verse 29, Paul says to his gentile audience, “if you are of Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed (σπέρμα), heirs according to the promise” (cf. 3:16, where Paul calls Christ Abraham’s “seed”). In 4:28, Paul likens them to Abraham’s son Isaac, calling them “children of the promise.” In his letter to the Romans, similarly, Paul points to Abraham as ancestor of both Jews and gentiles (“many nations”), which is what God meant (according to Paul) when Abraham was promised numerous descendants:

...Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it has been written, “a father of many nations (πατέρα πολλῶν ἐθνῶν) I have made you,” in the sight of him in whom he believed – God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things which do not exist – in whom from hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations (πατέρα πολλῶν ἐθνῶν) according to what was spoken, “thus shall your seed (τὸ σπέρμα σου) be” (Rom 4:16b-18).

The function of Abraham in Paul’s larger argument in Romans 4 is debated. A major part of the controversy centers on how to translate Rom 4:1, whether to understand its contents as Paul’s own view or that of his constructed interlocutor, and how to relate it to the preceding passage.<sup>57</sup> It is not necessary to resolve these issues here. What is most important for my discussion is a point which is widely acknowledged: Paul interprets Abraham’s story from Genesis in a particular way in order to craft a narrative consistent

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<sup>57</sup> See Richard B. Hays, “‘Have We Found Abraham to be Our Forefather according to the Flesh?’ A Reconsideration of Rom 4:1,” *Novum Testamentum* 27.1 (1985), 76-98; and Joshua W. Jipp, “Rereading the Story of Abraham, Isaac, and ‘Us’ in Romans 4,” *JSNT* 32.2 (2009), 217-42.

with his conviction that gentiles in Christ are children of Abraham, recipients of God's promise of blessings to both Israel and the nations.<sup>58</sup>

Caroline Johnson Hodge's work on Paul provides a helpful articulation of why the apostle would devise a narrative which includes "the nations" as recipients of God's blessings. She claims that the "central theological problem" which Paul addresses in his writings is gentile alienation from YHWH, and she argues that Paul attempts to solve this problem by creatively reworking gentiles' genealogy in order to construct for them a kinship link with Abraham. I summarize her claims here before demonstrating their usefulness for the present study. Through an analysis of Paul's oppositional language which divides the world into "Jew" and "non-Jew," Johnson Hodge shows that Paul, drawing on a biblical model of such binarism, "assumes a boundary between the descendants of a chosen lineage from Abraham, the chosen people of the God of Israel, and other peoples, who are not in good standing with this God."<sup>59</sup> Paul conceives of *Ioudaioi* as those with shared ancestry whose common history and special practices combine to demonstrate their status as a chosen people (Rom 9:4-5). Paul's self-descriptions use ethnically-charged words to identify him as part of this history and genealogy (Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5-6).

On the other side of Paul's divide stand all others: non-Jews who do not share in this ancestry or story of election. Romans 1:18-32 reveals Paul's understanding of

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<sup>58</sup> This conviction is not Paul's final point, of course. Rather, as Paul's rhetoric in Galatians reveals, some of the apostle's contemporaries disagreed with his claim that such gentiles could inherit the promise apart from circumcision. See J. Louis Martyn, "A Law-Observant Mission to Gentiles," in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997; orig. 1985), 7-24.

<sup>59</sup> Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 49.

gentile history: they have failed to recognize God, even though he revealed himself through creation, and so God allowed them to be consumed by their passions and fall into wickedness, the hallmark of which is idolatry. They served “the creature rather than the creator” (Rom 1:25). Johnson Hodge summarizes Paul’s positioning of gentiles in this way: “Lumping all non-Jews together in one group, Paul characterizes them by their rejection of the God of Israel, their loyalty to other gods, their cultic practices, and their resulting moral failures.”<sup>60</sup> The contrast is stark:

In Romans, both gentiles and Jews are shaped as peoples by their standing before the God of Israel. As adopted sons, the Jews enjoy all the blessings that result from this status, including ancestry, the Law, and worship. The gentiles, by contrast, are alienated from God and suffer the consequences of this situation: the worship of idols and the resulting enslavement to passions.<sup>61</sup>

Paul, Johnson Hodge claims, attempts to provide a solution for this estrangement between gentiles and God.

Abraham-as-ancestor is a central part of Paul’s solution. Johnson Hodge argues that it is in terms of kinship, paternity, and peoplehood through which Paul resolves the problem of gentile alienation: “baptism into Christ makes gentiles descendants of Abraham.”<sup>62</sup> Paul thereby constructs a “myth of origins” for gentiles in the Jesus movement. Paul is “[engaged] in mythmaking to remake and reorder the story of Israel

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<sup>60</sup> Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 51.

<sup>61</sup> Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 51.

<sup>62</sup> Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 4. On other ancient Jewish appeals to Abrahamic kinship, see Birgit van der Lans, “Belonging to Abraham’s Kin: Genealogical Appeals to Abraham as a Possible Background for Paul’s Abrahamic Argument,” in *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham*, eds. Martin Goodman, George H. van Kooten, and Jacques T.A.G.M. van Ruiten (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 307-18; and Nancy Calvert-Koyzis, *Paul, Monotheism and the People of God: The Significance of Abraham for Early Jewish and Christian Identity* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 6-84.

to make a place for the gentiles.”<sup>63</sup> The genre of myth is appropriate for Paul’s purpose so-conceived, since, as Johnson Hodge states (citing Burton Mack), myths “are particularly effective as purveyors of ideology because they call upon authoritative past events or relationships which authorize present-day arrangements (or changes in those arrangements).”<sup>64</sup> Johnson Hodge summarizes Paul’s myth in this way:

Paul relies on the logic of patrilineal descent to create a new lineage for the gentiles, a lineage that links gentiles through Christ to the founding ancestor, Abraham. By means of this kinship-creation, gentiles are made descendants of Abraham, adopted sons of God and coheirs with Christ. Paul makes a place for the gentiles – the ethnic and religious ‘other’ for the *Ioudaioi* – in the story of Israel, so that they may be made righteous before the God of Israel.<sup>65</sup>

Because of Christ, then, gentiles in the Jesus movement have access to Israel’s God through Israel’s founding patriarch because they too may now be considered Abraham’s descendants.

Johnson Hodge’s formulation of the principal theological problem which the apostle addresses is identical to the dilemma I have argued *Joseph and Aseneth* attempts to solve: gentile alienation from YHWH. The central narrative predicament in *Joseph and Aseneth* is precipitated by Joseph’s rejection of Aseneth on the basis of her separation from his God because of her idolatrous worship practices (see Chapter Three).

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<sup>63</sup> Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 5. She draws on Bruce Lincoln’s claim (*Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999], 207) that myth is “ideology in narrative form” in her formulation of Paul’s goal as persuasive in nature (*If Sons, Then Heirs*, 5).

<sup>64</sup> Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 5. I do not believe that Johnson Hodge’s subsequent claim that “Gentiles-in-Christ and Jews are separate but related lineages of Abraham” is a necessary conclusion based on her claim that Paul constructs a myth of origin for gentiles in Christ (page 5). This idea, which demonstrates Johnson Hodge’s participation in the so-called “Radical New Perspective” on Paul, has been persuasively problematized by Neutel (“‘Neither Jew Nor Greek’,” 291-306).

I propose that *Joseph and Aseneth* provides a solution by engaging in the same process of discursive mythmaking which Johnson Hodge identifies in Paul's writings: *Joseph and Aseneth* also uses a figure from Israel's past to authorize gentile inclusion. Unlike Paul's Abraham, however, Aseneth is not reconceived as a progenitor or an ancestor. *Joseph and Aseneth* portrays her as special to gentile converts in a different way: she is a City of Refuge for the "many nations" who flee to Israel's God and there find mercy and life (Chapter Three).

Many scholars have acknowledged that Aseneth's position as City of Refuge makes her a significant figure for subsequent converts. Typically, her role is expressed in terms of a paradigm: she is the model convert whose idol-abandonment other gentiles should emulate.<sup>66</sup> Recently, Ahearne-Kroll has challenged this consensus. She has suggested that Aseneth should not be seen as a model proselyte, but as a "model penitent for Hebrews and non-Hebrews alike."<sup>67</sup> She continues:

Aseneth becomes a "City of Refuge," and some scholars have interpreted this new name to imply that she becomes a city for converts to Judaism. Certainly Aseneth, as a convert, could have signified for converts their legitimate status within the community. "Way back when," a prominent convert was equal to Joseph in greatness and was welcomed by his family and significant in their lives. In this way, the characterization of Aseneth underscores what Joseph meant by his imperative about intermarriage. For JA, one's familial descent does not matter when constructing Jewish identity, but what is required is one's allegiance and devotion to God the Most High. Aseneth is Egyptian, but after she converts, Joseph marries her. This does not mean, however, that Aseneth models for converts what they should do; JA is not meant to signify that converts should

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<sup>66</sup> For example, see Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 214.

<sup>67</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, "Joseph and Aseneth and Jewish Identity," 240. As Ahearne-Kroll notes, the interpretation of Aseneth as a paradigm for future converts has dominated the past thirty years of scholarship on *Joseph and Aseneth* ("Joseph and Aseneth and Jewish Identity," 239 n. 79; 243).

repent for a week, expect an angelic visitation, and then experience some sort of initiation ritual.<sup>68</sup>

I agree that it is methodologically hasty to read metaphor as model, and this undefended semantic category has shaped scholarship on *Joseph and Aseneth* to such a degree that alternative, or additional, functions of Aseneth's new identity have not been adequately explored. Below, I argue that one of Aseneth's primary functions in the *b*-family version of the narrative has been overlooked: more than mere model, she is a proleptic mediator of God's eschatological renewal of (repentant) gentiles. Aseneth is not just a representative category, then, as her function as mediator is not one which can be successively replicated with subsequent converts.

Edith Humphrey is right to suggest that "Aseneth's status as 'City of Refuge' places her in some sort of relationship to others of the eschatological community, the community which will 'enter the rest provided for those who have been chosen' ([Bu] 8.9; 19.8)."<sup>69</sup> Two subsequent moments in the story confirm such an interpretation:

This is demonstrated visually in the bee episode, where the corporate importance of Aseneth's conversion is highlighted by the building of a honeycomb on her lips, from which all the bees are nourished. It is also demonstrated by the blessing of the seven virgins in solidarity with Aseneth ([Bu] 17.6) who are given a place as pillars in the "City of Refuge."

While Humphrey's impulse is fundamentally correct, she does not articulate precisely what sort eschatological function Aseneth might serve. In order to do so, we must examine the other place in the narrative where city imagery appears. In the *b* family of

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<sup>68</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, "Joseph and Aseneth and Jewish Identity," 241.

<sup>69</sup> Humphrey, *The Ladies and the Cities: Transformation and Apocalyptic Identity in Joseph and Aseneth, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse and the Shepherd of Hermas* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 44.



textual witnesses (except for 436 and W), Aseneth's role as protective city is conceived in procreative vocabulary: she is called a "walled metropolis" (μητρόπολις τετειχισμένη; Bu 16:16). She is no mere city; she is mother-city.

The association of Aseneth with motherhood is one which is faithful to her role in Israel's scriptures. In two of her three brief appearances in the biblical narrative, Aseneth's motherhood is featured.<sup>70</sup> In fact, it is the reason she is mentioned at all. Genesis 41:50 LXX states, "And to Joseph were born two sons before the seven years of famine came, whom Aseneth daughter of Petephres, priest of Heliopolis, bore to him" (my trans.), and Genesis 46:20 LXX similarly says that "sons were born to Joseph in the land of Egypt whom Aseneth daughter of Petephres, priest of Heliopolis, bore to him, Manassas and Ephraim" (Gen 46:20a LXX; my trans.). In these two verses, which comprise two-thirds of the Bible's references to her, Aseneth is a mother, the woman who bore Joseph's sons (οὓς ἔτεκεν αὐτῷ Ασεννεθ). The *b*-family textual expression of *Joseph and Aseneth* takes up Aseneth's procreative capacity and resituates her as mother-city, where her maternal role is expanded. In what follows, I argue that Aseneth's position as metropolis is intimately tied to the role of Zion in Isaiah, a mother-city who is said to

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<sup>70</sup> In her first appearance, she is named as wife of Joseph (Gen 41:45).

provide comfort, refuge, and mercy to the people of God, which includes God-worshipping gentiles.<sup>71</sup>

The ancient Greeks coined the word “metropolis” to describe a central *polis* that was the source (and usually sustainer) of outlying colonies. Given the extensive use of biblical language and imagery in *Joseph and Aseneth*, it is likely that the author is here drawing upon scripture, where eschatological Jerusalem is called *μητρόπολις*.<sup>72</sup> Isaiah 1:26 OG identifies restored Jerusalem as “a city of righteousness, the faithful mother-city

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<sup>71</sup> From a narrative-critical perspective, reading *Aseneth* as a figure whose function is richer than a model held up for emulation has the advantage of placing due emphasis on the (admittedly mysterious) apocalyptic section of the book. Chesnutt has argued that one of the fundamental concerns behind *Joseph and Aseneth* is to address internal Jewish discord regarding the status of converts in the author’s community (a position which I believe is compatible with my arguments), and to support this claim he points to the narrative’s over-the-top effort to show that transformed Aseneth has been accepted by God (*From Death to Life*, 108-115). One means of demonstrating this, in Chesnutt’s view, is the theophany in chapters 14-17, which “serves to authenticate Aseneth’s conversion by showing that her professed change corresponds to transcendent objective reality” (*From Death to Life*, 112). Humphrey, by contrast, has argued that the apocalyptic section should be given greater interpretive weight (*The Ladies and the Cities*, 30-56, esp. 43-44). She suggests that the heavenly visitor’s pronouncement of Aseneth’s new life and acceptance by God is not merely confirmatory but is “performative” (emphasis hers), since it “enacts what God is doing for Aseneth” (*The Ladies and the Cities*, 44). Aseneth is not, in Humphrey’s view, already confident and triumphant when the angel appears; rather, “her stance is that of the unworthy child of an all-powerful Father, a perspective which emphasizes the divine initiative” (*The Ladies and the Cities*, 44). In my view, the reading of *Aseneth* I present here accounts for the divine initiative apparent in the vision sequence and shows this scene’s relationship to the narrative’s broader motif of gentile conversion.

<sup>72</sup> Philo uses *μητρόπολις* six times in reference to Jerusalem and never of his own city of Alexandria (*Flacc.* 46, *Legat.* 203, 281, 294, 305, 334). See David T. Runia, “Polis and Megalopolis: Philo and the Founding of Alexandria,” *Mnemosyne*, Fourth Series, Vol. 42, Fasc. 3/4 (1989), 405. Sarah Pearce has made a compelling case that his usage of the term draws on Israel’s scriptures (“Jerusalem as ‘Mother-City’ in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria” in *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire*, ed. John M. G. Barclay [London: T&T Clark International, 2004], 19-36).

(μητρόπολις) Zion” (my trans.).<sup>73</sup> Aseneth’s receipt of new life from God in her narrative mirrors the renewal of Jerusalem, whose sin, like Aseneth’s, had caused separation from God. In subsequent passages in Greek Isaiah, Jerusalem’s role as mother *city* is extended into an image of Jerusalem as literal mother (i.e., one who gives birth).<sup>74</sup> In chapter 66, which foretells the restoration of Jerusalem, Isaiah uses language of childbirth to represent the renewal of the nation. As in *Joseph and Aseneth* (see Chapter Three), there are resonances here of a return to Eden. Mother Jerusalem, Isaiah says, bore the nation before the onset of labor pains (66:7), pains which comprised part of the punishment for the transgression of eating the forbidden fruit when humanity was expelled from the garden. Thus, “[a]s mother Zion gives birth to the nation, she simultaneously brings forth a new Eden.”<sup>75</sup> Jerusalem, as mother, will also suckle her children with “her breast of comfort” (μαστοῦ παρακλήσεως αὐτῆς; 66:11). Her sucklings (τὰ παιδία), moreover, will “be carried upon her hip and bounced upon her knees” (66:12b; Ackerman trans.).<sup>76</sup> In this image, the comforted children are the people of Israel, but Isaiah also conceives of Jerusalem as the place where one day “all flesh (πᾶσα σὰρξ)” will worship Israel’s God

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<sup>73</sup> The Greek word *μητρόπολις* in Isa 1:26 translates the Hebrew phrase *קִרְיַת הַנֶּאֱמָנָה* (“city of faithfulness”), which does not refer to motherhood. The image of Zion as “mother-city” is thus unique to the Greek version of Israel’s scriptures. The portrayal of Jerusalem as mother is indeed prominent in the MT, however (e.g., Isaiah 66). On this, see Chris A. Franke, “‘Like a Mother I Have Comforted You’: The Function of Figurative Language in Isaiah 1:7-26 and 66:7-14,” in *Desert will Bloom: Poetic Visions in Isaiah*, eds. Joseph A. Everson and Hyun Chul Paul Kim (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 35-55. Jerusalem-as-mother was a popular motif in Second Temple Judaism (e.g., 4 Ezra 9-10; Gal 4:26). See Pearce, “Jerusalem as ‘Mother-City,’” 33, and the literature cited therein.

<sup>74</sup> On this topic, see esp. John Schmitt, “The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother,” *RB* 92.4 (1985), 557-69.

<sup>75</sup> Susan Ackerman, “Isaiah,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary* (expanded edition), eds. Carol Ann Newsome and Sharon H. Ridge (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 174.

<sup>76</sup> Ackerman, “Isaiah,” 175.

(Isa 66:23 OG). Indeed, the book of Isaiah depicts an eschatological streaming of “many nations (ἔθνη πολλά)” to worship the God of Israel (Isa 2:2-3 OG).<sup>77</sup>

Isaiah 56 prophesies gentile worship of YHWH in Jerusalem using three conceits which the *b*-family version of *Joseph and Aseneth* also employs: the centrality of mercy, the use of wall imagery, and the motif of renaming repentant foreigners. This Isaian passage indicates that God’s mercy will soon be revealed (τὸ ἔλεός μου ἀποκαλυφῆναι; Isa 56:1 OG), ushering in a time when “the foreigner who attaches himself to the Lord” (ὁ ἀλλογενής ὁ προσκείμενος πρὸς κύριον) will not be cut off from God’s people (λαοῦ αὐτοῦ; Isa 56:3 OG).<sup>78</sup> Within God’s wall (ἐν τῷ τείχει μου), they will be given “an everlasting name” (ὄνομα αἰώνιον) which is a name “better than sons and daughters” (Isa 56:5 OG). Such foreigners who turn to Israel’s God (τοῖς ἀλλογενέσι τοῖς προσκειμένοις κυρίῳ) will be brought to his “house of prayer (τῷ οἴκῳ τῆς προσευχῆς),” which is now not only for Israel, but also for “all the nations (πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν)” (Isa 56:7 OG). As I have already

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<sup>77</sup> In its current form, which includes the contributions of multiple authors from different centuries, the book of Isaiah alternately portrays “the nations,” in John N. Oswalt’s terms, as “friend” and “foe” to Israel as well as both “servant” and “partner” (“The Nations in Isaiah: Friend or Foe; Servant or Partner,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 16.1 [2006], 41-51). Oswalt argues that “Isaiah in its present form is not content merely to insist that the nations move at Yahweh’s behest or that the activities of the nations are directed to achieve Yahweh’s purposes on behalf of his people. It also argues that Israel has a mission to the nations and that the nations will eventually join Israel in Jerusalem, where they will not only serve Israel but also share with Israel in the worship of God” (“The Nations in Isaiah,” 41). On this topic, see also Christopher T. Begg, “The Peoples and the Worship of Yahweh in the Book of Isaiah,” in *Worship and the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of John T. Willis*, eds. M. Patrick Graham, Rick R. Marrs, and Steven L. McKenzie (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 35-55; Gary Stansell, “The Nations’ Journey to Zion: Pilgrimage and Tribute as Metaphor in the Book of Isaiah,” in *The Desert will Bloom: Poetic Visions in Isaiah*, eds. Joseph A. Everson and Hyun Chul Paul Kim (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 233-55.

<sup>78</sup> On the theme of inclusiveness in Trito-Isaiah (chapters 56-66), see Shawn W. Flynn, “‘A House of Prayer for All Peoples’: The Unique Place of the Foreigner in the Temple Theology of Trito-Isaiah,” *Theoforum* 37 (2006), 5-24. Flynn rightly points out that this inclusion is not without preconditions, which include right worship of YHWH alongside Israel (page 11). The author of *Joseph and Aseneth* would agree, since Aseneth’s abandonment of idols is a precondition for her acceptance by God and Joseph.

discussed, *Joseph and Aseneth* similarly combines mercy, walls, and renaming with a promise of refuge for “those who attach themselves (οἱ προσκείμενοι)” to God (Bu 15:7/Ph 15:6).<sup>79</sup> Yet, it is Aseneth herself who is the locus for this promise. She, like Isaiah’s Jerusalem, has become the mother-city for returning Israel and for proselytes.<sup>80</sup> For the *b* family of textual witnesses, then, Aseneth is the mother-city who, patterned after Jerusalem’s comfort to repentant and restored Israel, also provides refuge for repentant and re-created gentiles, for the “many nations” who turn to Israel’s God and, like Aseneth, are renewed.

As I argued in Chapter Three, the textual expression of *Joseph and Aseneth* which imagines her “City of Refuge” as a gathering place specifically for Hosea’s “children of the living God” casts Aseneth as a mediator of covenantal mercy to restored Israelites and repentant non-Israelites. In this fluid part of the textual tradition, Aseneth’s role expands beyond foreshadowing and instating eschatological renewal of penitents: she becomes a proleptic mediator of Israel’s restored covenant as envisioned by the prophets (e.g., Hos 2:16-12).<sup>81</sup> Repentent gentiles who seek refuge in Aseneth, therefore, find not only renewal, but also covenantal inclusion, a motif developed (as I discussed in Chapter Three) on analogy with Israel’s transition from “not my people” to “children of the living God” (Hos 2:1 LXX). This reading of Aseneth provides, I believe, another promising

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<sup>79</sup> PQ has οἱ προσκείμενοι. This line is lost in the Syriac and does not appear in E, FW, or the Slavonic.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. the similar conclusion of Bohak, reached on different grounds (*Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis*, 76-78). In my judgment, this interpretation of the angel’s promises to Aseneth does not necessitate Bohak’s subsequent claim that the narrative’s eschatology is related to the Oniad Temple.

<sup>81</sup> The textual witnesses which attest the phrase “children of the living God” (or a close variation) principally belong to (secondary) textual family *a*, but the Hosean construction also appears in some *b*-family witnesses: the Syriac version, some Latin manuscripts of L2, and in Greek manuscript G.

correlation to the apostle Paul. In my judgment, the fact that some witnesses of *Joseph and Aseneth* explain gentile inclusion in the people of God by incorporating them into Israel's restored covenant constitutes overlooked evidence for the case that Paul sees his mission to gentiles as part of God's fulfillment of new-covenant promises.

Traditionally, scholars have not considered the covenant between God and Israel as occupying a significant position in Paul's message. E. P. Sanders' field-changing monograph *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, which influentially argued that ancient Palestinian Judaism should be understood in terms of "covenantal nomism" rather than "legalism," positioned Paul as distinct from his Jewish counterparts in Palestine because of the apostle's emphasis on "participation theology" rather than on Israel's covenant and Jewish law.<sup>82</sup> Morna Hooker has questioned, however, whether Paul's thinking is actually very different from the "covenantal nomism" Sanders describes, suggesting (in part) that the category of "covenant" cannot be dismissed when interpreting Paul. She claims:

If the idea of covenant is in any sense played down by Paul, it is only by contrast with the 'new covenant' which fulfils the promises made to Abraham before the Law was given. When Sanders writes that "*Paul in fact explicitly denies that the Jewish covenant can be effective for salvation*", he is right only if by "Jewish covenant" he means the covenant on Mt Sinai, which Paul regards as being of temporary validity, an interim measure until God's original promises are fulfilled.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

<sup>83</sup> Morna D. Hooker, "Paul and 'Covenantal Nomism,'" in *Paul and Paulinism: Essays in Honour of C. K. Barrett* (eds. Morna D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson; London: SPCK, 1982), 51.

Capitalizing on Hooker's suggestion, Jason Staples has recently argued that the prophets' new covenant is fundamental to Paul's proclamation.<sup>84</sup> He points out that while scholars often note the apostle's discrete allusions to new-covenant prophecy (e.g., Rom 11:27), "its central importance to the Pauline proclamation has been underestimated, in part because of a widely held view that Paul does not operate within a covenantal framework."<sup>85</sup> Staples insists, by contrast, that Paul conceives of his entire gospel as the fulfillment of new-covenant prophecy.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, the apostle uses language of "new covenant" in the institution narrative in 1 Cor 11:23-25 and depicts himself as a "servant of the new covenant" (2 Cor 3:6). Moreover, as Goodwin argues, Paul's use of "living God" language "illustrates that, in Paul's view, Gentile conversion is inextricably bound up with the living God's activity of reconstituting Israel and fulfilling new covenant

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<sup>84</sup> Jason A. Staples, "What Do the Gentiles Have to Do with 'All Israel'? A Fresh Look at Romans 11:25-27," *JBL* 130.2 (2011), 371-90.

<sup>85</sup> Staples, "What Do the Gentiles Have to Do with 'All Israel'?", 378. An important exception is Thomas R. Blanton, IV, *Constructing a New Covenant: Discursive Strategies in the Damascus Document and Second Corinthians* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 233) Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007.

<sup>86</sup> Staples, "What Do the Gentiles Have to Do with 'All Israel'?", 371-90. Staples interprets Paul's mission in light of new-covenant prophecy (particularly that of Jeremiah, the "prophet to the nations" [Jer 1:5; cf. Rom 11:13]) to the lost tribes of Israel and to Judah. Staples' most provocative (and idiosyncratic) suggestion within this interpretive paradigm is that it is faithful *gentiles* whom Paul conceives as "the returning remnant of the house of Israel, united with the faithful from the house of Judah" (380). Staples reads Paul's use of Hosea in Romans 9 within this framework. Hosea's words, he points out, are specifically for the northern kingdom of Israel, which has been "mixed among the peoples" (Hos 7:8) and may therefore no longer be termed "my people" by God. Rather, they are "not my people" because "[t]he house of Israel has intermingled, intermarried, among the nations, no longer having the distinction of being 'elect'" (381). They have become gentiles. They have been "swallowed up; now they are among the nations as a worthless vessel" (Hos 8:8 NRSV; cf. Rom 9:21-23). For Paul, according to Staples, gentiles are incorporated into the new covenant that God has made with Israel because faithful gentiles *are* returning Israel. It is not necessary to accept this conclusion in order to affirm the new covenant as significant to Paul's thinking. Intriguingly, however, Aseneth is the mother of Ephraim (Gen 41:50-52; 46:20; *Jos. Asen.* 21:9 [Bu]/21:8 [Ph]), whose name becomes synonymous with the lost northern tribes whose return is prophesied (e.g., Hos 11:8, 9, 12 LXX), and who Jacob says in Gen 48:19 will become "many nations" (πλῆθος ἐθνῶν), similar terminology to that which *Joseph and Aseneth* uses for those who will take refuge in Aseneth's (mother-)city (Bu 15:7/Ph 15:6).

promises.”<sup>87</sup> In 2 Cor 3:3, for example, Paul mixes “living God” terminology with new-covenant imagery from Ezekiel (11:19; 36:26; 37:1-14) and Jeremiah (38:33) when he writes “you are a letter of Christ, served by us, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God (πνεύματι θεοῦ ζώντος), not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”<sup>88</sup> Second Corinthians 6:16 provides another example (if 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 is not a later interpolation). Paul draws on covenant language from Lev 26:11-12 and the new-covenant prophecy of Ezek 37:27 when he writes that “we are the temple of the living God (ναὸς θεοῦ ἐσμεν ζώντος), just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they will be my people’” (2 Cor 6:16).<sup>89</sup> The combination of a positive stance toward gentile inclusion, “living God” terminology, and covenant language and imagery in (some witnesses of) *Joseph and Aseneth* provides further evidence for this understanding of Paul’s mission: it demonstrates the possibility of a Jew around the turn of the era who could conceive of God’s incorporation of gentiles as part of the fulfillment of Israel’s covenant with God.

This section has suggested three ways in which pairing *Joseph and Aseneth* and Paul is useful. First, Aseneth’s tale provides a more developed theology of Israel’s “living God” as creator and giver of life to gentile converts which serves to clarify Paul’s conception. Secondly, Paul’s use of Abraham to construct a myth of origins for gentile

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<sup>87</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 150.

<sup>88</sup> Goodwin provides a useful history of scholarship on interpretations of Paul’s phrase “spirit of the living God” (*Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 161-70); see also Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 122-53.

<sup>89</sup> James M. Scott, “The Use of Scripture in 2 Corinthians 6.16c-18 and Paul’s Restoration Theology,” *JSNT* 56 (1994), 78-82. See also Starling, *Not My People*, 65-67; Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 190-221.



inclusion in Israel provides a model which aids modern readers to conceptualize Aseneth's discursive function in her tale. In the *b*-family version of *Joseph and Aseneth*, the (gentile) heroine is a proleptic mediator of God's eschatological renewal of gentiles. Finally, some textual witnesses portray Aseneth as a mediator of Israel's restored *covenant* to gentiles (as I argued in Chapter Three). *Joseph and Aseneth* provides, therefore, an example of a Jewish stance toward conversion which sees gentile incorporation as fulfilling the prophets' promises of covenantal renewal, a position which is not unlike that which some (minority) Pauline scholars have attributed to the apostle.

### **Synthesis and Conclusions**

This chapter has shown that *Joseph and Aseneth* is not the only ancient text which depicts Israel's "living God" in terms of God's position as original creator of the world. *Jubilees* and Paul do so as well. The relationship of this creative, "living" God to gentiles varies in these ancient authors' conceptions, however. As I have shown, *Jubilees* uses "living God" theology to highlight the exclusiveness of genealogical Israel, a singularly-elected people with strict boundaries. Paul's "living God" terminology, by contrast, functions similarly to its role in *Joseph and Aseneth*, which is to depict the creative, life-giving activity of Israel's God vis-à-vis gentile converts.

The disparate conclusions these ancient authors reach about the relationship of Israel's "living God" to gentiles is related to their varied conceptions of Jewish identity. In ancient constructions of Jewishness, there is a direct relationship between self-definitions based more or less on genealogy with varying levels of Jew/gentile boundary-permeability. We may imagine a sliding scale on which individual Jewish authors may

be located: the greater the emphasis on Jewishness as biological filiation, the less permeable the boundary between Jew and gentile, and conversely, the greater the emphasis on Jewishness as religious practice, the more permeable the boundary between Jew and gentile.<sup>90</sup> While *Jubilees* belongs on the far end of the scale where Jewishness is genealogical and gentiles are therefore forever excluded, Paul and *Joseph and Aseneth* are on the other end of the scale, since they both affirm the possibility of gentile inclusion, as long as those gentiles conform to the religious requirement of worshipping YHWH exclusively. Indeed, as I have shown, Paul and *Joseph and Aseneth* share a discursive project, which is to provide theological justification for gentile incorporation into Israel. Moreover, they go about making their case in a similar way: each uses a biblical figure from Genesis to construct a myth of origins for gentile inclusion.

Finally, I suggest, this chapter has demonstrated that it is profitable not only to categorize these authors on such a sliding scale, but also to investigate *how* they make their case for border (im)permeability. When we do so, we may be more attuned not only to the theological developments in the Second Temple period which accompanied the sociological novelty of gentile conversion to Judaism, but also to the literary and rhetorical devices those authors used to articulate their changing conceptions of God, self, and “other.” Since *Jubilees* and Paul, like *Joseph and Aseneth*, employ the epithet “(the) living God” as they interpret Israel’s scriptures and Israel’s past in the course of developing a particular construal of gentile access to Israel’s God and to Jewish identity, I submit that this epithet was one such touchstone of Jewish theological expression.

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<sup>90</sup> See Hayes, *Gentiles Impurities and Jewish Identities* (esp. 8-9); and Gary G. Porton, *The Stranger within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994).

## CONCLUSION

Ancient Jews continually negotiated definitions of “self” and “other” in the face of changing circumstances. Increased contact with gentiles in post-exilic Judaism led to a considerable body of literature which articulated in some way what it meant to be Jews among gentiles. Questions about the relationship of Israel’s God to “the nations” would have also arisen naturally from the Jews’ own biblical meta-narrative, the story of their collective self.<sup>1</sup> While they believed that God chose Israel to be a special people set apart by the covenant, they also affirmed that this same God created the entire universe and remained sovereign over creation.

*Joseph and Aseneth* represents one Jewish author’s attempt to wrestle with the universality of God alongside the particularity of Israel’s covenantal relationship to God. In so doing, this ancient author fashions a story which draws upon categories from the biblical narrative of Israel and God in order to explain (and justify) real-life social change. For this ancient author, the novelty of conversion – the new phenomenon of gentiles’ becoming Jews – demanded revised reflection upon the nature of God and upon the identity of “self” in relation to “other.” Given the importance of storytelling in Jewish tradition, it should be no surprise that such reflection took the form of a narrative which is simultaneously entertaining and didactic.

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<sup>1</sup> Donaldson makes this point well (*Judaism and the Gentiles*, 1-2).

Aseneth's tale is indeed a remarkable story of gentile conversion fashioned by an inventive Hellenistic Jewish writer. But it is not the only one. Second Maccabees, for example, depicts the (fictionalized) radical reversal of Antiochus Epiphanes, who sets out to destroy Judaism but ultimately makes a vow that, in addition to freeing Jerusalem and making the Jews "equal to citizens of Athens," he "would become a Jew and would visit every inhabited place to proclaim the power of God" (2 Macc 9:13-17 NRSV). The book of Judith tells of the conversion of an Ammorite general: "when Achior saw all that the God of Israel had done, he believed firmly in God. So he was circumcised, and joined the house of Israel, remaining so to this day" (Jud 14:10 NRSV). All three of these narratives treat conversion as (in part) a change of religious loyalty.<sup>2</sup> These gentiles worship the God of the Jews and so become Jews.

Cohen is right to comment that a formulation of Israelite identity as tied to religious loyalty rather than biological filiation is not present in the Hebrew Bible: "The Tanakh has adumbrations, intimations, harbingers of the idea, but not the idea itself."<sup>3</sup> Cohen's principal argument about the development of conversion in Judaism is that it came about as an "analogue to conversion to Hellenism," as Greek culture and language became partitioned from a sense of Greek ethnic identity.<sup>4</sup> Yet it is another insight which is more significant for contextualizing the findings of the present project, and that is

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<sup>2</sup> Cohen points to the latter two examples to illustrate that Jewishness in the Hasmonean period transitioned from an ethnicity to an "ethno-religion," since it gained a new meaning of religious loyalty to the Jewish God (*The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 129-30). Their transition is one of theological belief (cf. Philo's comments in *On the Virtues* 20.102-103 [also cited by Cohen]).

<sup>3</sup> Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 130.

<sup>4</sup> Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 135.

Cohen's attempt to articulate how a logic of conversion might have developed out of the "raw materials" provided in Israel's scriptures. He envisages later Jewish authors thinking through the issue in this way:

According the numerous passages in the Torah and the Prophets, God chose the Israelites to be his people and the Israelites chose God to be their Lord. Such a conception provides an ideological basis for conversion, because the link between God and his people is not "natural" but "covenantal" and would seem to allow others too to choose God to be their Lord. The Israelites became a nation by standing at the foot of Mount Sinai and binding themselves to God and the Torah through an oath. Could not gentiles too bind themselves to God and the Torah and thereby make themselves into Israelites? Just as God once chose the Israelites to be his treasured people, could not God continue to choose individuals from among the nations to join his treasured people?<sup>5</sup>

This argument for conversion begins with the biblical notion of covenant. It makes a case for gentile access to Israel's God based on God's action (and Israel's response) at Sinai. Gentiles may have access to Israel's God, so the logic goes, because God can form a covenant with anyone who chooses to worship God exclusively.

*Joseph and Aseneth* participates in this project of developing "raw materials" from Israel's scriptures into an argument for the possibility of conversion, that is, an explanation for how and why gentiles may gain access to the Jewish God and to Jewish identity. Yet, this ancient author develops an alternative logic to the one Cohen articulates. I have shown that *Joseph and Aseneth* starts not with a covenant-forging God at Sinai but with a creator God "in the beginning."<sup>6</sup> In Aseneth's tale, God's principal activity is re-creation, not election. Thus, while the forging of the covenant is indeed a

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<sup>5</sup> Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 135.

<sup>6</sup> While some witnesses of *Joseph and Aseneth* develop a covenantal motif through the Hosean phrase "children of the living God" (see Chapters Three and Five), this allusion to the notion of covenant is not ubiquitous in the manuscript tradition. Furthermore, in all forms of Aseneth's story, the primary theological language used to describe God is drawn from creation, as I demonstrated in Chapter Three.

formative event in Israel's peoplehood, it is not the only moment in the scriptural meta-narrative which holds promise for post-biblical Jewish authors who want to provide a logic for gentile conversion which is faithful to the portrayal of God's activity in Israel's scriptures.

I have identified, furthermore, the specific "raw materials" which help the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* make this case: the biblical epithet "(the) living God," in combination with creation language and imagery from Genesis 1-2 and the motif of "life" from the Genesis Joseph cycle. The author thus pulls together two scriptural actions of Israel's God – the creation of the whole world (Gen 1-2) and the provision of life to Egyptians as well as Hebrews in Gen 37-50 – in order to re-deploy a divine title which in other scriptural contexts (Deut and the DH) inscribes boundaries between gentiles, on the one hand, and Israel and Israel's God, on the other. For *Joseph and Aseneth*, the epithet "(the) living God" functions as a discursive boundary marker between God and idols and between those who worship God and those who worship idols; yet, this narrative disturbs ethnic binarism by portraying a repentant gentile idol-worshiper as the object of the creator God's re-creation and the recipient of new life from Israel's "living God." By underscoring the living God's position as creator of all, *Joseph and Aseneth* depicts a God to whom all humans may have access. (This access is conditional, of course – but it depends not upon one's biological descent but upon one's re-creation, which requires abandoning all gods but YHWH.)

*Joseph and Aseneth* thereby provides further evidence for the continued dismantling of an old paradigm in biblical scholarship which views early Christianity as a

universal religion which shed the deep-seated ethnic particularism of ancient Judaism. Indeed, this characterization, which sees Judaism and Christianity as fundamentally opposed, has already been challenged from both sides. Denise Kimber Buell's *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* combats the interpretation of early Christianity as "an inclusive movement that *rejected* ethnic or racial specificity as a condition of religions identity" by arguing that Christians drew upon the category of ethnicity for multiple reasons, including their own self-definition.<sup>7</sup> Caroline Johnson Hodge's work on Paul, discussed in Chapter Five, has shown that the apostle certainly did not abandon the category of genealogical descent, or the fundamental opposition between "Jew" and "gentile," in his re-formulation of Jewish tradition in light of the Christ event.<sup>8</sup>

The caricature of ancient Judaism as uniformly particularistic has also been unmasked as a scholarly fiction. In the introduction to his invaluable sourcebook *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (135 CE)*, Terence Donaldson claims that "Judaism was in its own ways just as 'universalistic' as was Christianity – indeed, in some ways even more so."<sup>9</sup> As evidence for this claim, he identifies four "patterns of universalism" in ancient Judaism which he traces from Israel's scriptures through ancient (non-Christian) Jewish literature: (1) gentiles' sympathizing with Jews and Judaism by taking up one or more Jewish practices; (2) gentiles' converting to

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<sup>7</sup> Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 1. See also Love L. Sechrest, *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race* (London: Clark, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*.

<sup>9</sup> Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, 1.

Judaism by fully adopting Jewish ways and being adopted by the Jewish community; (3) gentiles' having access to a single universal deity through ethical monotheism, a system in which Torah is seen as an expression of a universal natural law; and (4) gentiles' participating in "eschatological redemption" by abandoning idols and/or making pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the eschaton. Donaldson detects three out of four of these patterns in *Joseph and Aseneth* – all except number 4, which I have shown *is* in fact present in the *b*-family version of the narrative since Aseneth is there viewed as a proleptic mediator of the eschatological renewal of gentiles (Chapter Five).

More important than these individual patterns, in my judgment, is the result of their combination: what I call the "strategy," that is, the narrative's synthetic argument in favor of gentile inclusion along with the literary devices used to develop that argument. I have suggested that *Joseph and Aseneth* draws upon and re-deploys inherited traditions in order to provide theological warrant for conversion through constructing a "myth of origins" for gentile inclusion. The epithet "(the) living God" is a literary device which advances *Joseph and Aseneth*'s project by emphasizing the creative capacity of Israel's God in order to underscore God's universal reach. *Joseph and Aseneth* ultimately transforms the biblical epithet into a tool to support its theological justification of gentile conversion to Judaism.

Such universality, however, does not negate the particularity of God for this ancient author. Like Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, and like the Hellenistic Jewish narratives treated in Chapter Two, *Joseph and Aseneth* uses the epithet "(the) living God" as a boundary-drawing device to separate Israel's God from all other



gods. Furthermore, the metaphor of “life” in *Joseph and Aseneth* is a means of articulating the blessings of God’s covenant with Israel (Chapters Three and Five). Thus, the narrative does not universalize God in such a way that Israel’s special status is undermined. Rather, it universalizes *access* to God by defining the entry requirement not as something one *is* but as something one *does* (i.e., worship YHWH exclusively). Jewishness is thus conceived in religious, rather than exclusively ethnic, terms.

For this reason, the apostle Paul is a particularly apt conversation partner. In his letter to the Romans, Paul constructs Jewish identity in spiritual terms as he famously claims that a *Ioudaios* is not someone who is so ἐν τῷ φανερόν, outwardly (Rom 2:28), but is rather someone who is so ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ, inwardly (Rom 2:29; cf. 9:6). Many Pauline scholars have recognized that *Joseph and Aseneth* holds promise for comparison with specific aspects of Paul’s letters. I have engaged two of them in this dissertation: Moyer Hubbard’s analysis of “new creation” in *Joseph and Aseneth* as a precursor to his articulation of Paul’s conception, and Mark Goodwin’s history of “living God” terminology as “Jewish background” to Paul’s theology.<sup>10</sup> The reverse is not true: Paul’s writings are not usually explored for potential evidence they may bring to scholarly questions surrounding *Joseph and Aseneth*. One major reason for this phenomenon is a, perhaps unconscious, partition between Paul’s writings as “Christian” and *Joseph and Aseneth* as “Jewish.” Because Paul is a Christian author whose ideas developed out of Judaism (so the implicit logic would go), his letters are not relevant for studying *Joseph and Aseneth* because his ideas have “gone beyond” the (non-Christian) Judaism of *Joseph*

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<sup>10</sup> See also J. M. G. Barclay, “Paul among Diaspora Jews: Anomaly or Apostate?,” *JSNT* 60 (1995), 101-03.

*and Aseneth*. Goodwin's treatment of Paul makes this assumption when he draws a straight line from "the Jewish background of the living God" (which, for Goodwin, includes *Joseph and Aseneth*) to Paul's usage and understands this background as "particularly useful in filling out the Pauline picture of the living God."<sup>11</sup>

I have shown, by contrast, that there was not one unified conception of Israel's "living God" in ancient Judaism. The connections between Paul's thinking and that of the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* therefore become all the more significant. Goodwin goes on to claim that Paul's teaching "was no simple continuation of Jewish views since, for Paul, the living God had also raised Jesus from the dead," but, I suggest, their shared use of "living God" terminology in the development of a similar theology of gentile conversion actually confirms Paul's fundamental *continuity* with Judaism.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Paul is not merely engaging Jewish views but is also producing them, since he too is a Jew (Rom 9:3; 11:1; Gal 2:15). As Karin B. Neutel puts the point, "Paul is not defined by first-century Judaism, rather, he, along with others, defines first-century Judaism."<sup>13</sup> This dissertation has provided yet another piece of evidence in support of the case that Paul is best interpreted within Judaism rather than outside of it. As Daniel Boyarin has observed, Paul remains a Jew even if he is a "radical" one.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 109.

<sup>12</sup> Goodwin, *Paul, Apostle of the Living God*, 109.

<sup>13</sup> Karin B. Neutel, "'Neither Jew Nor Greek': Abraham as Universal Ancestor," in *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham*, eds. Martin Goodman, George H. van Kooten, and Jacques T.A.G.M. van Ruiten [Leiden: Brill, 2010], 301). See also Barclay, "Paul among Diaspora Jews:," 115-119.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Yet, as useful as the parallels are, it is a disparity between Paul's myth of origins for gentile inclusion and that of *Joseph and Aseneth* which sheds particular light on the latter. Despite Paul's comment about spiritual Jewishness in Rom 2:28-29, ethnicity and ancestry remain fundamental to the apostle's myth since he creates a new genealogy for gentiles which links them to the patriarch Abraham (Chapter Five). By contrast, language of ethnicity in *Joseph and Aseneth* is conspicuous by its (near) absence. In fact, in a distinctive move, *Joseph and Aseneth*'s language appears to partition ethnicity from religious practice, two categories which in the ancient world were usually inseparable.<sup>15</sup> I showed in Chapter Three that Aseneth's new life entails a new identity and a new family; she becomes bride of Joseph and daughter of God. Yet, unlike Paul, *Joseph and Aseneth* eschews language of ethnicity in the formulation of the boundary. That is, whereas Paul uses the oppositional ethnic categories "Jew" and "gentile" to express the fundamental separation between the two groups, *Joseph and Aseneth*'s pivotal boundary-inscribing scene does not. In all of the earliest witnesses, Joseph defines himself not as a Hebrew, not as a son of Israel, not (anachronistically) as *Ioudaios*, but rather as ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεῖ, "a man who worships God" (Bu/Ph 8:5).<sup>16</sup>

The only instance in *Joseph and Aseneth* in which the author employs an ethnic term to refer to God's people is when the narrator describes Aseneth's beauty as more

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<sup>15</sup> Paula Fredriksen puts the normative view in the ancient Mediterranean this way: "Gods run in the blood; cult is an ethnic designation/ethnicity is a cultic designation" ("Mandatory retirement: Ideas in the study of Christian origins whose time has come to go," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 35 [2006], 231-46).

<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere Joseph is termed "the Powerful One of God" (Ἰωσήφ ὁ δυνατὸς τοῦ θεοῦ; Bu 3:4/Ph 3:6; Bu 4:7/Ph 4:8 [PQ has ἐκλεκτός]; Bu/Ph 18:1 [in some mss]; Bu/Ph 18:2 [in some mss]). While Aseneth identifies him as "the shepherd's son from the land of Canaan" (Bu 4:10/Ph 4:13), it is clear that the narrative rejects such a classification, since Aseneth comes to realize that she has spoken in error and that Joseph is in reality *God's* son (Bu 6:2-3/Ph 6:5-6; Bu 13:13/Ph 13:10).

like “the daughters of the Hebrews” than “the virgins [or daughters] of the Egyptians” (Bu 1:5/Ph 1:7). Even when Joseph separates from “the Egyptians” to eat (7:1), this term is not set in contrast to a comparable ethnic identification of Joseph. Thus, while the author is both aware of and willing to employ ethnic vocabulary, the author does not do so when drawing the boundary between Joseph and Aseneth in 8:5. What makes Aseneth “a strange woman (γυναιῖκα ἀλλοτρῖαν)” is not that she is an Egyptian, but rather that she does not, like Joseph, worship Israel’s “living God” (Bu/Ph 8:5).

In contrast to Paul, then, *Joseph and Aseneth* does not rely upon a re-worked genealogy to make its case for gentile access to YHWH. It instead offers a myth of origins which casts a converted gentile heroine as a figure in whom later converts may find God’s mercy, refuge, and life. This move also stands in stark contrast to later rabbinic interpretations of the figure of Aseneth which *did* explain her incorporation into the people of God by creatively reworking her ancestry, claiming that she was in reality the daughter of Dinah (e.g., *Pirke R. Eliezer* 38).<sup>17</sup> For the author of *Joseph and Aseneth*, the title heroine is incorporated not through a change in her genealogy but through a change in her religious loyalty.

In closing, I venture to say that the apostle Paul is not, in fact, the *most* radical Jew in antiquity – or at least not the only one. His model of gentile inclusion is still fundamentally dependent upon genealogy, even if figurative rather than physical. *Joseph and Aseneth*, by contrast, invites gentiles to join Israel through the analogy of Aseneth, who gains kinship with Israel not principally through descent, whether biological or

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<sup>17</sup> This midrashic legend has been carefully traced in Victor Aptowitzer, “Asenath, The Wife of Joseph: A Haggadic Literary-Historical Study,” *HUCA* 1 (1924), 239-306.

spiritual, but through a religious action: a conversion of religious loyalties which makes her suitable to marry Joseph and results in her status as a symbolic (mother) figure who mediates God's life and mercy to all who repent, including other gentiles. What ultimately matters for the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* is not ancestry but practice. What matters is that one worships Israel's "living God."

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